Silas House • Winners of the 2001 Appalachian Fiction Contest • John O'Hara

NOW & THEN

THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

THE CENTER FOR APPALACHIAN STUDIES AND SERVICES • EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

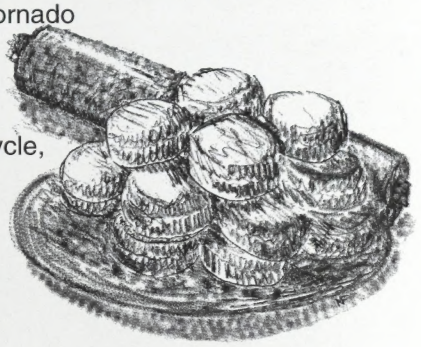
Volume 18, Number 2 • $7.00

Rolling Pin

Sleek cylinder, pure pine, ten inches long,
two-and-a-quarter in diameter,
one of the first utensils she acquired
in 1926 when she and George
set up housekeeping. Bread, after all,
is any diet's staple—for Southerners,
bread meant biscuits, hot, three meals a day.

Within five years, the four-inch handles
were broken in a quarrel about something
neither could recall in years to come.
Surrendering to her feisty nature,
she'd picked up the handy rolling pin,
hurled it at the husband whom she loved
more than bread, much more than breathing.
Missed her target, for which she thanked the Lord
most fervently, but there's the rolling pin
with nothing to hold onto during baking.

No matter. Foda fixed a batch of biscuits
that night for supper, next dawn at breakfast,
and on and on for fifty years, hands
spread wide on that damaged pin
to smooth, compress the round mound of dough.
Late one spring, her swelling waistline
and heaving mornings signaled motherhood,
and when she reached for those absent handles,
she was swept back to her childhood home
where blows and hard words whirled, a mean tornado
crushing trust and hope, canceling love.



It must have been when staring at those circles
on either end, marking what was missing,
she vowed, pledged—swore!—to break the cycle,
turn roiling waves of rage away from others
direct them, without flinching, to herself.
Perhaps that's why, in five decades of baking
and rearing children, she did not consider
purchasing another rolling pin.
Three times a day she hoisted her reminder
of darkest what-had-been, not realizing
how that fractured tool was now transformed,
compelling witness to the power of love.

—Sally Buckner

Sally Buckner has had poetry published in Southern Poetry Review, Potato Eyes, Christian Century, *and* Crab Creek Review, *as well as in four anthologies. She has edited two anthologies,* Our Words, Our Ways *(a collection of North Carolina writing) and* Word and Witness: 100 Years of North Carolina Poetry. *Her collection,* Strawberry Harvest, *was published in 1986 by St. Andrews Press.*

Cover design by Nancy Fischman. The photographs of the typewriter and the hands writing are by Christine M. Goldbeck. Quoted material sources are (clockwise from top right): Kevin Stewart, T.J. Morral, Silas House, Wayne T. Caldwell, and Laura Weddle. The handwritten text is by Christine M. Goldbeck. Cover layout by Hillhouse Graphic Design, Kingsport, Tenn.

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"Try to tell them there are other stories — many, many other stories. For instance, there are stories about characters who both love and hate where they're from. They hate where they're from because they can't stay there and find fulfilling jobs, thus they have to leave the mountains they love. It's all about love. Tell them the best West Virginia stories are love stories."

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ARTICLES

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for reviews to: Marianne Worthington, Communication & Theatre Arts Dept., Cumberland College, 6000 College Station Drive, Williamsburg, KY 40769. *Now & Then* guidelines are available on the World Wide Web at: cass.etsu.edu/n&t/guidelin.htm. *Now & Then's* homepage is cass.etsu.edu/n&t/index.htm.

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TBR No. 130-001-01 1.25M
ISSN No. 0896-2693

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Printed by B&B Printers, Inc., Bristol, Tenn.

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Now & Then has been published three times a year since 1984 by the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University. The Center is one of the State of Tennessee's Centers of Excellence supporting artistic, scholarly, and public service projects in the region. For membership information see *NewsCASS* or visit cass.etsu.edu/cass/member.htm.

Submissions of poetry, fiction, articles, personal essays, graphics, and photographs concerned with Appalachian life, past and present, are welcomed if accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Upcoming deadlines: Appalachia and the World—November 1, 2001 (for Spring 2002); First Person Appalachia—March 1, 2002 (for Summer 2002). Address correspondence to: *Now & Then,* Box 70556, ETSU, Johnson City TN 37614, or e-mail: woodsidj@etsu.edu. Send Poetry to: Linda Parsons Marion, 2909 Fountain Park Blvd., Knoxville TN 37917. Send book reviews or suggestions for reviews to: Marianne Worthington, Communication & Theatre Arts Dept., Cumberland College, 6000 College Station Drive, Williamsburg, KY 40769. *Now & Then* guidelines are available on the World Wide Web at: cass.etsu.edu/n&t/guidelin.htm. *Now & Then's* homepage is cass.etsu.edu/n&t/index.htm.

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Appreciating James Still

James Still—poet, novelist, and short story writer—died in Hazard, Ky., on April 28, 2001. Hailed as the "Dean of Appalachian literature," he was the author of the classic 1940 novel, River of Earth, *along with several poetry and short story collections. The recently published volume—*From the Mountain, From the Valley: New & Collected Poems*—was edited by Ted Olson. Olson offers his appreciation of Still's work.*

James Still may have been born outside the Eastern Kentucky in which he spent most of his nearly 95 years, but he was no outsider. The writer was born in east central Alabama in the southernmost foothills of Appalachia, and his ancestry on both sides hailed from the Virginia mountains. He valued Appalachian culture greatly—so much so that after arriving as a student at Lincoln Memorial University in Harrogate, Tenn., near the Cumberland Gap, and "rediscovering" his ancestors' central Appalachian culture, he immersed himself in it.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, several authors assessed Appalachian life from the perspective of outsiders. These authors tended to produce stereotypical accounts of their subjects rather than knowing depictions. It takes a long time for someone not from a place to know its culture intimately, and most local color writers were unwilling to remain in Appalachia for long. Had they spent more time in the region living and working as equals with the people they wrote about, writers such as Mary Noailles Murfree and John Fox Jr. would surely have resisted employing the stereotypes that weaken their writings. Local color writing, then, was the product of passive bystanders, of interlopers, of exploiters.

In contrast, as a result of Still's immersion in the particular strain of Appalachian culture found in Eastern Kentucky, his work from the outset was as far from local color writing as the considerable distance—geographically or emotionally—that most of his local color predecessors had lived from the places about which they were writing. Still's purpose for coming to Eastern Kentucky during the Great Depression was not to exploit the hillfolk, as local color writers and industrialists had done, nor to reform the culture, as many missionaries had wished to do. Rather, he came to Knott County to help people, serving as he did as the librarian at the Hindman Settlement School. He stayed because he found the place beautiful, its people fascinating.

Over the years, Knott Countians grew to accept Still as a valued member of their community, and his writing did not break that trust because it did not sensationalize their culture. Throughout the 20th century, many outsiders made money manipulating the image of Appalachian people in literature and the media, but Still refused to participate in such endeavors. He wrote sympathetically about Appalachian people because he was their colleague at the Hindman Settlement School and he was their good neighbor and friend. His work reflects how well he knew them.

He understood the people of Eastern Kentucky so well in part because he had deep rural roots in the southernmost reaches of Appalachia and in part because he was open-minded and unselfconscious toward his adopted culture. He resisted preconceived notions; he simply wished to observe the natural and cultural life around him and to reflect upon that world in his writing. He did not seek personal glory, as that would have wedged a barrier between himself and his neighbors.

He *chose* to live in Eastern Kentucky—to the good fortune of Eastern Kentuckians. Had he happened to live elsewhere, he would surely have written well about that place and those people. His poetic evocations of the Eastern Kentucky mountains and valleys and of the folklife found there—regardless of the literary genre into which those evocations were cast—together constitute one of the most distinctive regional oeuvres in American literature.

—Ted Olson

Ted Olson is assistant professor of Appalachian Studies and English at East Tennessee State University's Center for Appalachian Studies and Services.

Letters to the editor should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to: *Now & Then,* CASS/ETSU, Box 70556, Johnson City TN 37614-1707 or e-mailed to woodsidj@etsu.edu. Letters may be edited for length and clarity before publication.

Fiddle

The silver light that dances on your strings
Runs like melting snow from knotted twigs,
Burning the greying hours with fire-spun wings
And stirring a pith of words into your melody.
The groined and vaulted ceiling of your song
Measures the sky with swift and anxious feet,—
O supple as white oak staves your balladry.

You are the strident lute, the harp upon the hill
Lighting veins of clay against the chimney's breast.
You are unspoken pain, spurned words that fill
The heart to bursting in a thorny cove.
And you can dance a lively galliard at your will,
Or turn again with sudden blossoming bow
To a cardinal flaming in a redbud grove.

—James Still

"Fiddle" is reprinted from the volume From the Mountain, From the Valley: New & Collected Poems *by James Still, edited by Ted Olson.*
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fiction 2001

APPALACHIAN FICTION COMPETITION

The contest entries in *Now & Then's* 2001 Appalachian Fiction Competition were really a strong collection of stories. There were 89 of them, sent in by 64 writers from all over the region and throughout the country, from California to Maine.

Managing editor Nancy Fischman and I have been screening submissions together for years now. We usually agree without too much difficulty on which pieces of fiction are the strongest. This time, however, we discussed, occasionally argued politely, changed each other's minds and then turned around and changed our own minds, re-read, and did a fair amount of agonizing. When you're sending finalists on to a final judge of novelist Lee Smith's caliber, it was a good problem to have.

Our thanks to Lee Smith, author of such novels as *Oral History* and *Fair and Tender Ladies,* for the obvious care with which she went about her judging duties. She took the time to write extensive and thoughtful handwritten comments on each story we sent her.

And of course our thanks to the permanent fiction prize sponsors, First Bank & Trust Co. of Abingdon, Va., and the University of Tennessee Press of Knoxville, publisher of the forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Appalachia* being produced here at the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services at East Tennessee State University. Having the funding in place for this biennial fiction competition makes our life much, much easier.

Remember: The Center and *Now & Then* sponsor competitions for poetry in even years and for fiction in odd years, making the deadline for the next fiction contest March 2003.

—JHW

THE FIRST BANK & TRUST FIRST PRIZE

Wayne T. Caldwell, Candler, N.C.
Sponsor: First Bank & Trust Co., Abingdon, Virginia

"'The Burning Tree' will stay long in my mind as one of the strongest and most fully realized stories I have ever read."

—Lee Smith

The Burning Tree

Henry Sutton was plowing when he heard the school house bell ring ten times running. He stopped the mule and stared in that direction. It wasn't a fire; at least there was no smoke, no more than cookfires and burning trees would account for. The mule snorted and looked vaguely down the field. Henry didn't know what the trouble was, but on Wednesday afternoon about two o'clock that fool bell shouldn't have been ringing. He waited.

It rang again, measured decimal counterpoint, and stopped. He decided this meant trouble, dropped the reins, and started toward the house. Callie was on the porch, dishrag dangling in one hand, her eyes shaded with the other, looking toward the bell. About the time Henry got to the road Silas Wright came tearing up from the creek on his big black mare. Silas stopped and asked Henry did he want a ride. Henry waved at Callie and pointed at Silas and she nodded. He got up behind Silas and they tore off down the road, Henry holding on for dear life.

Still no unusual smoke. They met people coming both on foot and on animals, from up Shanty Branch and all around the midsection of the valley. Palmer Chapel's door was open and it was empty. A sudden cloud covered the sun, and a mockingbird in a beech tree sounded first like itself, then like a jaybird. Close to the creek, they rode in deep shade from the trees on the left and the mountain on the right. Pillow-thick moss covered rocks near the creek. Henry thought he saw the white flash of a doe's tail across the creek. When they got to the

> That morning, Marion eyeballed a huge black gum girdled a year or more ago and set afire about the last frost and again a week or two ago. It no longer smoldered, but it was still in his way.

schoolhouse patch a considerable crowd of children and women milled, and menfolk rushed down the road.

Henry scooted off the mare and found the schoolteacher. "Miss Valerie, what in the world is a-goin' on?" After he spoke he remembered to take off his hat. She was only eighteen and a mess of freckles dotted her cheeks and neck, her red hair

Mary L. Caldwell

Wayne T. Caldwell

"I have always wanted to do some serious fiction, but I really wasn't ready for it until I turned 50," says Wayne T. Caldwell, who reached that magic age three years ago.

Born in 1948 in Asheville, N.C., Caldwell grew up as the adopted only child of Troy and Ruby Caldwell. Troy was a mechanic at American Enka Corp., and Ruby was a housewife. After having earned degrees in English from the University of North Carolina (UNC), Chapel Hill, and Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C., the younger Caldwell went on to earn a doctorate in literature from Duke University in Durham, N.C. His specialty was 17th century devotional poetry.

Teaching first at North Carolina Central University in Durham and then at Union College in Schenectady, N.Y., he did his best to launch an academic career in the early 1970s. However, once he realized that there were entirely too many newly minted Ph.D.s chasing after far too few tenure slots, Caldwell decided to move back to the mountains. There he carved out a future that wasn't quite the one he'd envisioned while working on his dissertation on metaphysical poet George Herbert.

In 1976, he went to work for his in-laws' furniture business in downtown Asheville. His wife Mary's parents, Ray and Sarah Long, had bought Sluder Furniture Company, the city's oldest furniture retailer, in the mid-1960s from a member of the family who had started it back in 1905. While Mary Caldwell, a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., currently works as a chaplain at Asheville's Mission St. Joseph's Hospital, Caldwell and sister-in-law Kathryn are president and secretary, respectively, of Sluder's and its interior design division, Ambiance Interiors.

"It's kind of fun when it's fun. And it's a lot of work when it's work. I'm running a business, and I've never taken a business course in my life, so it's been interesting." Despite his 50-hour work weeks at the store, Caldwell did occasionally find time to produce articles and book reviews for various religious publications and a 1987 history of the Hominy Baptist Church in Buncombe County, but he had never attempted fiction.

What was it about his milestone birthday that prompted him to act on his longstanding desire to attempt creative writing? "Well, I think it's probably a combination of things," he says. "When you turn 50, you look at that and say, 'I don't have all that much time left.' The other part of it is just having read enough and having enough life experience to know where you need to go with your writing."

In 1999, Caldwell entered a story called "The Pact" in a short fiction contest organized by UNC's alumni association. Inspired by the death of his mother's cousin, who had been found one morning frozen to death in a creek, the story won first prize. "And I said, 'Oh, well, maybe I do have some talent here.'"

He's since published another story in *Our State* magazine and is at work on a novel set in the Cataloochee Valley where his paternal grandfather was born. "What I'd like to tell is the

fiery in the sunshine. She looked at him like he ought to put that hat right back on. What little hair Henry had went six ways from Sunday.

"There's trouble up around Lucky Bottom, I heard, Mr. Sutton, but I don't know what kind. I'm keeping the pupils here until we know it's safe to go home."

It was Henry's uncle Marion Carter's fence and Henry thought Marion would sure get put out about that hole. He'd only built the fence a couple of months ago, careful to cut and split the rails in the dark of the moon so they would last longer.

"Much obliged," Henry said and turned back to Silas.

"Let's head back thataway," Silas hollered. "Come back on with me."

Henry hauled himself on the horse again and Silas sawed the reins. They headed back up the road like a house afire, passing folks right and left.

About a quarter of a mile from the church someone had broken a hole in the new-laid worm fence and folks ran through it. It was Henry's uncle Marion Carter's fence and Henry thought Marion would sure get put out about that hole. He'd only built the fence a couple of months ago, careful to cut and split the rails in the dark of the moon so they would last longer. Marion was fussy about his farming and always did things by the signs. Even if Good Friday came as early as March 20 he planted beans, even in the snow. Now his new rail fence was busted, Henry thought, and Marion would be madder'n an old wet hen.

Marion lived up the valley toward Henry's place but was clearing a field on a piece in Lucky Bottom he had bought from Nelson Massie, the storekeeper and postmaster at Nellie. He had cleared about three acres so far. He removed most of the trees and underbrush with an ax. The large trees — chestnuts and poplars and black gums, some of which were big around as wagon wheels — he girdled and waited for them to die. When they were dry enough he set them afire. Some of those old trees smoldered for weeks.

Marion was in his mid-thirties and as blue-eyed as they came. He wasn't a large man, but he could do twice the work most men could do in half the time. Folks were used to seeing him down at Lucky Bot-

story of how the National Park Service treated the folks they ran out in the late 1920s and early 1930s when they were establishing the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. I'm not quite sure what I'm doing, but I've probably got some 450 pages, some of which hangs together and much of which doesn't. I'm hoping it's going to coalesce one of these days."

"The Burning Tree" is Caldwell's imagined re-creation of what took place on the afternoon that a falling tree killed his great-grandfather as he was clearing land. "I think it would be just awfully rotten luck to be plowing and minding your own business and then suddenly get killed by a tree," he muses. "I guess what drew me to the family stories about my great-grandfather were pretty much the same thing that drew me to the story of 'The Pact': trying to figure out some sort of reason for an absurd death. This doesn't make any sense. Why did this happen?"

He considers himself an Appalachian writer. "I live here and I was born here and I write, so I guess that would be appropriate," he observes dryly. "I just finished a piece that has a little side story about a character who wanders around in eastern North Carolina after having been born in the mountains and then returns to his home territory. When someone asks him why he came back, he says, 'I just couldn't face another day waking up without seeing the mountains.' You know," Caldwell says, acknowledging the fact that his fictional character is clearly speaking for his author as well, "it sort of gets in the blood."

— JHW

tom, making the earth say something besides wilderness. He came before daylight with his mule and wagon. He hung a lantern on the wagon and honed his bushax and singlebit in the dark. First light discovered him tearing into trees or vines, jumping rabbits, spooking foxes.

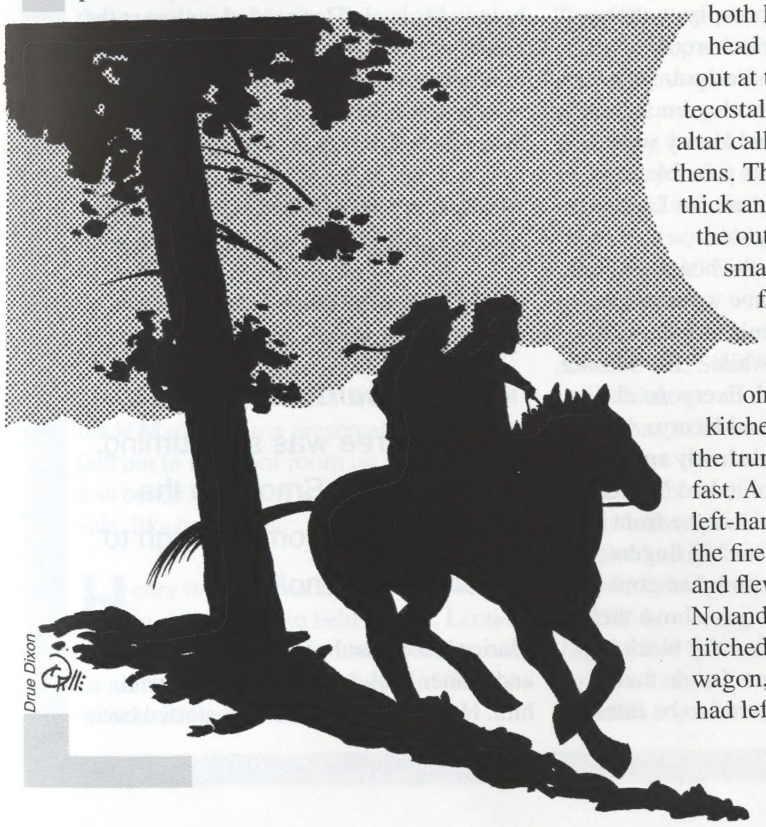
He particularly disliked bittersweet and briars. He found the daddy stem of a bittersweet tangle and hacked it off at the ground and yanked it out of the trees it entwined and twirled it around his head like a lariat, green leaves and orange seeds and brown pieces of bird nests flying every which way. He threw it on a pile to burn. After he cleared the center he plowed it and seeded it in rye and started on the outer edges again. The clearing got ever wider, little by little.

That morning Marion eyeballed a huge black gum girdled a year or more ago and set afire about the last frost and again a week or two ago. It no longer smoldered, but it was still in his way. Its dark form against the sky looked like an immense horned dragon. Marion thought of Daniel's fourth beast, about which he had read to his family the night before. He decided it needed a new dose of fire. The trunk was easily four feet in diameter. It rose fifty feet before there was a limb. Then it bifurcated like a man holding both hands far over his head and arching his arms out at the elbows like a Pentecostal preacher straining an altar call among perfect heathens. The curved limbs were thick and heavy and spiked on the outsides by the stubs of smaller limbs that had fallen as the tree died.

He slung coal oil as high as he could on the trunk and struck a kitchen match. Fire leapt up the trunk lizard-like, circling fast. A hawk watched atop the left-hand limb. When it saw the fire, it lifted, circled once, and flew toward the top of Noland Mountain. Marion unhitched the mule from the wagon, hitched the plow he had left the other day, and started his morning's work. He wanted to bust out about a half-acre to grow sweet 'taters in the late summer. It was rough going. Every couple of feet the points caught roots of bygone plants and he halted the mule and backed it a bit and grubbed them out of the ground.

> The last thing was, after about an hour, an odd snap like thunder overhead, something not quite right, a huge punctuation mark in his consciousness.

At noon by the sun he ate the dinner Lizzie packed for him in the shade of a poplar on the opposite end of the field from the black gum. He made sure no poison oak climbed the tree before he leaned against it. He wolfed down a piece of pork roast, some cornbread, a baked sweet 'tater, and a few dilly beans. For dessert he bit into a fried apple pie, the fruit squishing out on his bare cheek. The apples were fresh stripedy Junes, a bit tart, and that just suited him. As he wiped with his shirtsleeve, a flake of crust fell into his lap. Something gray and quick bounced seemingly right out of the ground. A fat squirrel hit a sourwood trunk about two feet up, disappeared behind it, then turned sideways and backwards. Its tail twitched on the right of the tree trunk and its beady eyes peered at him from the left. Then it straightened



Drue Dixon

behind the trunk and turned jerkily, head now pointing right, and jumped to the ground, bouncing up the hill into the forest. Marion wondered where it was bound. He finished the pie and the sweet milk Lizzie had packed, then put his hat down over his eyes and took a short nap.

When he awoke the tree was still burning. From that angle it looked like an enormous ragged candlestick. Wind came from down the valley and the smoke trailed west in boiling coils from the upper limbs. He and the mule got back to work. The last thing was, after about an hour, an odd snap like thunder overhead, something not quite right, a huge punctuation mark in his consciousness.

When Henry and Silas got to the new ground, men wrestled with an outsized smoking limb from the black gum. It had fallen just behind the mule, now standing thirty yards away and looking at the men, whose hands and arms and faces were sooty black. The limb was big around as a man at the base and arched upward about twenty feet. Under it Henry saw spindly human legs askew, boots on the ends, toes downward, motionless. Buckets littered the ground where the men had carried water from the creek to put the fire out.

The limp body was flat and blackened and smoked slightly, like somebody had stepped on a roach and an ember together at the hearth's edge. Henry felt he might be sick.

Henry and Silas joined the others. When they tried to push the limb off Marion it was hot, and the body moved upward with it. They shoved it sideways and Marion moved that way too. When they turned it enough to see if he might still be alive they saw he had been impaled through the back by the remnant of a smaller limb that poked out his belly on the other side. Blood came from his mouth corners and nose. He never knew what hit him, they thought.

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They finally got the limb over on its side. Henry and Silas took Marion's crushed shoulders and pulled him off it, or the others pulled the limb out of Marion, Henry couldn't decide which. The limp body was flat and blackened and smoked slightly, like somebody had stepped on a roach and an ember together at the hearth's edge. Henry felt he might be sick. Marion's hat lay ten or twelve feet away. Henry got it and put it back on Marion's head as if to make things better. Henry got one leg, and Silas took the other, and the two Messer boys, who had been walking up the road when the branch fell and who saw Marion get killed — one of them had sounded the alarm — took his shoulders and laid him in the wagon bed. A squirrel chittered overhead.

Henry looked at his uncle's body. His head wasn't crushed but one eye skewed far right, and the other looked straight ahead. A pink pumpknot shone on his forehead and dark charcoal streaked his face like Indian paint. Somebody showed up with another bucket of creek water and Silas and Henry wiped Marion's face as clean as possible with their shirttails. "I shore hate for Lizzie to have to see this," Henry said.

"Somebody go up to the house and tell her," Silas said. "Get some women over there. We'll hitch the mule and Henry'll bring him on in a little while." The Messer boys headed up the road. Everyone else gave back except Silas and Henry.

A clot of black blood slowly spread on the wagon bed. Silas unhitched Marion's overalls and held his shirt in the front and unbuttoned it gingerly, his big fingers shaking the fabric. The limb had gone all the way through Marion just above the belly button and bits of smoky black bark lined the hole in his chest. Inside that hole were what Silas figured to be intestines. They cleaned his front off best they could and Silas rebuttoned the shirt and backed away. Henry tucked it into the overalls and re-hitched them. He got Marion's tobacco and pocketknife out of the front bib and checked his side pockets. He found a buckeye worn black and slick and a handkerchief and a clip with a two-dollar bill in it. He put these in his own front bib to give to Lizzie.

When they turned the body over they knew they couldn't do much more. The torn fabric covered with soot made one with the wet flesh and clotted blood and gore. They saw white bone deep in the hole in his back. Henry tried pulling at the cloth but just made it worse. They turned him back over and someone lent them a shirt to cover Marion's face. Silas hitched the mule to the wagon. Henry found Marion's tools and coal oil can and lantern and dinner bucket and put them in with him. He flicked the reins and started back

It was a beautiful day. The sun had set behind the mountain, but they still had a couple of hours' worth of daylight. Henry looked toward Lucky Bottom. That old tree was still burning, he reckoned. Smoke in the breeze came from too high to be chimney smoke.

to the house with his uncle's crushed body. "He wadn't but thirty-six or seven," Henry thought. "Shame for a man to have to go like that, young as he was. Still, he never knowed what hit him. I shore hate to bring him home like this, though."

By the time he got to Marion's place Silas had gone home and brought Rhetta, and Callie had come too. Rhetta and Callie sat inside with Lizzie. In the bare front yard he heard Lizzie wail. Folks on the front porch motioned Henry to bring the wagon around back. They had covered the big table on the back porch with oilcloth, and they laid Marion out there. After Henry put the mule in the barn he and Silas took a mattock and shovels and headed across the field and up the steep hill to the cemetery. They spent the afternoon digging a grave beside Old Levi, Marion's father, leaving a space for Granny Carter, who looked like she was fixing to live forever, now having outlived three of her dozen children. When they returned, the women had somehow made Marion into a presentable corpse laid out in the front room on a long backless bench. They sat with him, on either side, like bookends.

After Henry put the mule in the barn he and Silas took a mattock and shovels and headed across the field and up the steep hill to the cemetery. They spent the afternoon digging a grave beside Old Levi, Marion's father, leaving a space for Granny Carter, who looked like she was fixing to live forever, now having outlived three of her dozen children.

Henry took off his hat when he went in. Silas came in behind him. Lizzie was upstairs, they said, resting. She would be all right after a while, they said. Henry went to his uncle and saw a man who looked like he might have been asleep, until he noticed the no longer red knot on his forehead. He touched Marion's cold hand briefly. Then he couldn't help it. Tears started from his face; he took Marion's things out of his overalls and put them on the table and had to go outside.

He blew his nose on his old yellowed handkerchief and looked across the field. It was a beautiful day. The sun had set behind the mountain, but they still had a couple of hours' worth of daylight. Henry looked toward Lucky Bottom. That old tree was still burning, he reckoned. Smoke in the breeze came from too high to be chimney smoke. Silas came out on the porch with him.

Silas took a twist of tobacco and cut off a hunk and put it in his mouth. Henry looked at him. Silas offered a chew but Henry shook his head. "Silas, you can see that widowmaker still burning down there, you know it?" Silas nodded and spat, careful not to hit Lizzie's flowers. "What kind of luck does a man have when he's out minding his own business and a dadgum tree falls on him? I cain't get over it."

Silas stretched to his full height, then sat on the front step. "Well, Henry," he said, slow as molasses, "I don't reckon I know that. What I do know is a mighty good man is a-layin' dead in there. They'll set up with him tonight and we'll carry him up to his grave tomorrow and bury him. And we won't never see him again 'til we get to heaven. And 'bout the first thing I want to ask him is whether he knowed, just for a second, he was about to die and what went through his mind when he knowed it. And did he see Jesus when he did." Silas shook his head and spat again.

"You reckon he had an idea he was about to die, Silas?"

"I think we all do, Henry. Around here a man has to know he's just a cat hair away from dyin' any time, whether hit's a tree fallin' on him or a snake bitin' him or his horse spookin' and throwin' him off and bustin' his head wide open. Or the old Devil gettin' him drunk and makin' him crazy, like that time Uncle Lige got so tiddly he thought that old she-bear was an Indian and tried to run her off with a garden hoe. Bear liked to have kilt him deader'n a doornail before his brother rescued him. This place is purty, and I love it, but by God it's deadly. Marion in there's proof of that."

Henry squinted. "Well, I remember my brother died of the bloody gravel when he was a young'un. He was ten or eleven, best I remember, and he howled like a painter for days before he died. Uncle Marion don't have to look forward to that kind of dyin', anyhow."

"Yep, there's a heap of things worse than getting' kilt by a tree. I've knowed folks took years to die and they knowed it ever pain-ridden step of the way. I hope when my time comes, hit's like Marion in there, quick, sudden-like. How you reckon them women got him looking so peaceful?"

"I don't rightly know," Henry said. "He's shore improved from when we laid him in that wagon down there. He made a right good corpse."

They sat and watched the dying light. Soon they saw not butterflies but moths and smelled the food neighbors had been bringing all afternoon and heard crickets start up. When they talked at all it was of weather and crops and cattle. Tomorrow Marion would become one with the valley. One day they would too. Darkness and mystery engulfed them. Callie and Rhetta came out and found them silent and watchful. They told them to come in for some fried chicken. N&T

HONORABLE MENTIONS

"The Cool of the Day"
Silas House
Lily, Kentucky

"Chickens Will Roost"
Dot Jackson
Six Mile, South Carolina

"The Prisoner"
Llewellyn McKernan
Barboursville, West Virginia

"To Catch a Beetle"
Donna Warmuth
Boone, North Carolina

"The Promise of a Sweet Life"
Brenda Witchger
Cary, North Carolina

The University of Tennessee Press Second Prize

Tami Penley, Nickelsville, Virginia
Sponsor: The University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville

Good writing throughout this fine story. Well constructed, too. I like this story a lot!
—Lee Smith

Spring Cleaning

Stella threw her green plastic pan of used-up dishwater out the backdoor. It made a dirty gray arc, then fell against the cracked sidewalk and ran towards the driveway. She watched and let her eyes drift ahead of the dingy little river. Oh, no. There was bleach in that water. She'd been cleaning pint Mason jars, dumping out last year's apple-and-onion chow-chow. It didn't taste right to her, looked dark in the jars.

She knew better than to throw bleach water into the yard. Damn. With one hand, she pitched the pan and grabbed the splayed porch broom and took off after the spreading stain running towards the end of the tilting sidewalk, tilting towards the butterfly bush with its little branches just beginning to grow fat and full of life with the warm spring weather.

She outran the water trail and wiped at the deadly stream just before it reached the end of the concrete.

Safe. No poison water to bathe the deep, fleshy roots of the butterfly bush that had lived at the end of the sidewalk since she was a girl. She'd planted that bush herself when she was sixteen, dug the hole, lined it with good composted manure … Stella felt her breath coming and going, not reaching past the bony ridges of her collarbones.

"You O.K., Stella?"

She turned to see Willard peering at her from behind the screen door. When had he come in from the field? Even from the yard, she could see that look around his mouth, that lord god almighty what has possessed that woman now and damn it I sure do need me a Camel but those aren't allowed anymore at my house and there'll be no lunch either not even light bread and bologna much less something hot and me working all day on that tractor bouncing my guts around pulling the manure spreader look.

This was not a new look. Stella read between all the lines there on his sun-puckered face.

"Stella?"

"Fine, Willard, fine. Just washing the sidewalk with some good bleach water."

"I see that," he said. "It especially dirty?"

"Just spring cleaning."

"Oh," he said and moved to the end of the big wraparound porch away from her. She heard him unzip, heard the hot stream begin to flow.

"Marking your territory like that is killing all the grass on that side of the porch, you know. We do have a bathroom, old man."

He looked over his shoulder at her and zipped again with that peculiar tucking of the hips that meant he was putting away his prized possession. She'd passed truckers stopped beside the highway and seen that movement and known what they were up to.

"I prefer to swing in the breeze on a day like this, thank you kindly. If you are through disinfecting the yard, let's get a bite to eat. Still need to get that back pasture finished before dark. Rain tomorrow."

Stella swiped one last time at the remaining water, making sure none was left to soak into the dirt around the butterfly bush, then went to him. Penises and bellies, a man's two main concerns.

After Willard ate his fill of warmed-up soup beans and day-old cornbread, he left. Stella was glad to see him go. There were things that needed doing today. Things that needed tending. She'd had the urge in the last month to get things in order. Put things right. Down in the basement, six boxes sat full of old clothes and junk waiting to be taken to the Salvation Army over in Kingsport; piles of old clothes and tools from when her parents still lived here lined the back wall. Most of it from when her and Willard were first married and moved back into the house with her widowed mother to help take care of the place. What was left of her first set of Corel dishes, a pink-globed lamp she'd gotten with saved-up Green Stamps. It was time to sort out things. She'd called Mike and Jenny to come over this weekend and go through the piles of stuff she'd kept since they were babies: rubber pacifiers gone gummy over time, report cards with moldy spots, dolls with missing arms and hair, Tonka trucks with no tires. Love letters and high school yearbooks that smelled like the basement.

Today it was the kitchen's turn. Stella was tired of the Tupperware bowls with their slimy lids, the mismatched mugs with slogans like "Stay-Fresh Bread: From Our House to Yours" gathered over the years. She wanted to look into her cupboards and see neat rows of matching cups, smooth plates with no chips. Maybe

She knew better than to throw bleach water into the yard. Damn. She outran the water trail and wiped at the deadly stream just before it reached the end of the concrete. Safe. No poison water to bathe the deep, fleshy roots of the butterfly bush that had lived at the end of the sidewalk since she was a girl.

Courtesy of Tami Penley

Tami Penley

Tami Penley had just watered her butterfly bush, which made her think of the huge one that used to grace her grandmother's yard. She found herself recalling a recent conversation with a good friend about getting rid of things that aren't needed anymore. And she also remembered how deeply her grandmother had grieved over a stillborn son. "She never got over that. Every time she got sick—and she was a very ill woman—she would be back at that time when she lost the baby," says the writer.

Eventually, Penley retreated with her laptop to the family's remote Scott County, Va., farm and assembled those bits and pieces of narrative into her award-winning story "Spring Cleaning." Like much of Penley's short fiction, "Spring Cleaning" depicts the life of a mountain woman who lives close to the earth and explores her relationship to her own body.

"I think my interest in the female experience probably came from growing up in a society where there was such a break between what women and men did," speculates the Scott County native. "The women were to clean the house, take care of the food, and watch the children. The men took care of the animals, plowed, and tended the fields.

"When I was a little girl, that never worked for me. I never wanted to be in the house learning how to make chow-chow. I always wanted to be outdoors where the men worked. I love animals and trees and dirt and worms and fish and would almost be a naturalist if I could be. In writing about those women, I've tried to find the domestic part of myself and to understand it a little better."

Instead of growing up to be a naturalist, Penley is currently a college instructor. She collected degrees in English from both the University of Virginia's College at Wise and from East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tenn. Now on the faculty of Mountain Empire Community College in Big Stone Gap,

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she'd get her collection of Fire-King Jadeite out again. It had been packed up in the spare bedroom since Willard learned that, thanks to Martha Stewart, the milky green glassware was worth a small fortune. Too bad. She liked the color. It was hers. Time to put it into use, not store it away for the future. She could still hear her mother's hoarse, tobacco-rough voice before she died last year telling her, "Don't use that good stuff. Save it for Jenny's girls." Stella was tired of saving up the good stuff for later, for the pleasure of other people. What good had that done her mother? Helen Addington Salyers had died without ever enjoying the things she had saved.

By three in the afternoon, Stella had five neat piles of broken kitchen gadgets and dishes stacked on the old chest freezer on the porch. She walked into the yard to get her breath back. The yard needed work. Her flowerbeds were in bad shape, still draped with last year's dead stalks and vines. She needed to get more onion sets in the ground. The butterfly bush should have been cut back hard last fall. Now it was going to grow gangly, all out of shape. But she hadn't had the heart last fall to cut it back. Her mother's slow death had taken too much of her time, too much of her energy.

She squatted beside the old bush and pushed back the dried leaves at its base. The smell of earth rose to meet her. Stella wanted to dig in the warming spring dirt, push her hands down past the earthworms and the Easter flower bulbs she'd planted there almost ten years ago,

> There were things that needed doing today. Things that needed tending. She'd had the urge in the last month to get things in order. Put things right.

keep pushing until her forearms were covered, farther, until her nose came up against the ground, push on, going under, feeling the loamy richness fill her mouth, slide into the pink canals of her ears, good Virginia dirt filling her up as she gathered up broken white twigs and round little stones to carry down with her to the water table, then on …

A crow cawed as it flew overhead, and Stella came back to herself. She lay on her stomach against the still-cool spring

Va., she teaches English and humanities.

Years ago, she and husband Brian, who works at Eastman Chemical Co. in Kingsport, Tenn., made a decision to stay in Southwest Virginia. "We had thought about leaving the area," she admits, "but then it got time to bring children into the world. I decided I wanted to raise them here more than any other place. I didn't feel like breaking new ground with my children. I wanted my daughter and son raised in the soil I had been raised up in. And we decided to stay." The family eventually purchased the farm — "73 acres of hillside and rock," notes Penley, laughing — they now call home.

In Penley's view, a writer who does not possess a strong sense of place is at a disadvantage. "I guess I do consider myself an Appalachian writer because I think the best writing is always rooted in a particular experience in a very particular place. Then you can transcend that experience and place, and it becomes universal.

"For me, that place just happens to be the Appalachian Mountains. These mountains inform me. I would have a harder time writing about the plains of Kansas or the coast of Key West — a little harder time, anyway. I do think, though, that a writer could go any place and bring out that same universal connection. It just might take a bit longer."

In 1994, Penley won second prize in *Now & Then's* first fiction contest for "A Change in the Weather." The following year, she won the Virginia Highlands Competition in Abingdon, Va., along with her mother, Freda Dingus Taylor, for "The Light of Day," a collaborative story. And she has plenty of nonfiction publishing credits, including the public relations work she did for Mountain Empire during the past year.

She has not yet published much in the way of fiction, however, for the simple reason that she is loath to send her work out. There is a novel-in-progress (a biomedical thriller), a novella, and many Penley short stories that have never really seen the light of day. "I keep them very close to me. I've often felt like when I send them out, they're going out to be judged. And I sometimes don't feel like they're quite ready for that — or I don't want them to go through it. Really, I don't want *me* to go through that," she laughs. "It's hard not to be swayed, not to let someone else's opinion of a piece color your opinion of a piece and where it needs to go.

"I'm trying to change that. I've gotten to the point where I realize that as an artist and as a writer, I need to send them out." So look for her to work on overcoming her qualms and finally send her fictional children out into the wide world.

— JHW

ground, her face against the rough bark at the bottom of the butterfly bush. She examined her hands, her arms. No dirt clung to her pink everyday sweater with its too long arms, just a few old leaves. Clean and dry. No evidence of her trip underground.

Maybe Willard was right. She was losing her mind. It was her turn, wasn't it? She'd fought off the urges, the madness, since she was a child.

Maybe Willard was right. She was losing her mind. It was her turn, wasn't it? She'd fought off the urges, the madness, since she was a child. The madness rode in her Salyers blood, she'd been reminded all her life by her mother, tainted with some Old World strain that tended to drive the women from her father's side of the family crazy. She'd heard the tales about Salyers women. Wild women. Bad women who danced and smoked pipes and didn't keep clean houses. She'd been warned time and again: Don't be like them, don't be like them. Keep your floors scrubbed. Stay home. Don't make eyes at men. Don't touch yourself there, don't be looking down there. Bad girl. Bad, bad girl.

She'd held back the madness all her life. Kept the urges at bay. Now, somewhere in her belly, the biological timer had sounded the alarm — time for Stella's bad blood to rise to the surface like an old bruise. She examined the backs of her hands. Were they turning darker with the rising stain of the old blood? No, they looked the same. But they didn't feel the same. Nothing felt the same. Her bones didn't seem to fit quite right beneath the flesh but rode at odd angles that made her joints get out of kilter. Like her knees might suddenly decide to bend the wrong way. Or that her neck would forget how to hold up the weight of her head. Strange flashes of being sick at her stomach.

Last night, she'd slept on the couch in the den again. Not that sleeping with Willard was disgusting, or even upsetting, just wrong for her right now. He'd looked at her across the dark bedroom, lit with only his cheap Wal-Mart reading lamp, and nodded as she gathered up her assorted pillows and limp flannel quilt. He was a good man. He just smelled wrong to her these days. Not all the time, just sometimes. She'd get a whiff of his warmth rising from the bedcovers during the night and feel nausea rising in the back of her throat. She'd been like that with her mother sometimes.

The old woman took to her bed three years ago with a touch of the flu, made worse by her emphysema and the Winston cigarettes she smoked right up until the hour she finally died, and just never bothered to get up again. Ever. For anything. She used a bedpan and demanded

Stella started crying. Felt the sobs start in her groin and move up to her mouth. Great noisy heaves that shook her body. She kneeled in the dirt and leaned against the hoe, crying as she cradled pieces of the onion against her chest.

her meals be brought to her on an old Coca-Cola tray and that Stella come with a warm cotton rag and wash off the dead skin clinging to her back, massage her hoary, terrible feet, read passages from the mildew-speckled family Bible.

Stella did the right thing. She took care of her mother. But often she would have to run outside to throw up, dry heaving behind the woodshed.

Now the smell of Willard did the same thing. She'd wake up, smell him, and feel her stomach grow fluttery, like she was in bed with a stranger. The feeling would spread out from her middle and made her face go hot. The feeling made her want to jump up and run across the dark yard to the barn and climb into the attic to hide in the moldy, sweet hay, to swing naked from the rafters like she had that summer when she turned sixteen, that summer …

Enough. She got to her feet. The sun was getting low in the western sky behind the mulberry tree. Willard would be home anytime now, wanting supper. There was still work to do. She needed to get a move on. Onion sets. That would keep her busy. She'd get the onion sets in the ground in the lettuce bed. She liked to plant a few rows of onions a couple of weeks apart until the weather turned really warm. Guaranteed fresh green onions through most but the hottest part of summer.

Stella gathered the brown paper bag of onion sets tied up with cotton twine from the refrigerator, got the hoe from the woodshed, and headed to the garden. The ground was still soft, ready for the little balled-up onions. She dropped onion sets in nice rows beside her canvassed lettuce and the other rows of onions put in over the last couple of months.

One of the onions seemed too soft, rotten at its core. Stella hunkered down on her haunches and started unpeeling it. Peeled off layers, scraped at the pungent waxpaper-thin sections until the onion lay in pieces, its seed-heart exposed and dying in the weak afternoon sunlight.

Stella started crying. Felt the sobs start in her groin and move up to her mouth. Great noisy heaves that shook her body. She kneeled in the dirt and leaned against the hoe, crying as she cradled pieces of the onion against her chest.

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Then Willard was there. He stood above her and patted her messy gray head with its leftover perm. Stroke, stroke. Like she did their barn cat Prissy. With the absent-minded motion of a good rocking chair.

She pushed his hands away and ran on aching knees across the yard to the rain barrel and plunged her hands in up past the elbows. Dirty. Her hands were dirty. She scrubbed them together hard, rubbing. She brought her hands up, sniffed them, then retched in the grass beside the rusty barrel.

Willard kneeled down beside her and wiped her face with the clean handkerchief from his overalls pocket dipped in the rain barrel.

She curled into him, put her mouth up next to his ear as he held her, whispered, "It was already broke when it got here, Willard. It couldn't be helped, I knew that. Too little. No breath. I tried to blow air into its face, get it to take a breath, but it never moved, just lay curled up, no bigger than the palm of my hand, slick with blood, but perfect, perfect. I already had me a hole dug. Was putting in that butterfly bush for Momma when the pains hit me. I passed it out back in the outhouse used to be there. Caught it as it came out of me. Wrapped it in my good silk slip and laid it to rest there," she pointed to the butterfly bush at the end of the walk. "Never told anyone."

"How old was you?" he whispered back.

"The summer I turned sixteen."

He leaned away from her, made her look him in the eyes. "Not ours then?"

"No, no, somebody else, before I knew what it meant. He worked on the Collins farm next door. Older than me. We snuck off to the hayloft in the spring that year, climbed naked through the rafters, explored. I was a bad girl. Momma had warned me to stay away from him, to not let anybody touch me there. I was a bad girl, Willard. I'm sorry, so sorry."

"No, no, Stella, you was never bad. Ain't got it in you to be bad. Now, hush, shhh, let's get inside. Your momma, God rest her soul, well, she was just cold-hearted. Told you lots of things that just ain't right. If we hadn't of been living under her roof all these years … Come on, let's go to the house. The air's getting a bite to it."

He lifted Stella to her feet. She leaned against his denim work jacket and smelled the spring fields there in its folds and fabric, smelled the good sweat of this man mixed with diesel fuel and motor oil. They moved toward the porch together.

Her bones seemed to fall back into place as she walked, back to some original shape that had been lost somewhere, and she felt light, lighter and cleaner than she had in all her life. N&T

How to Write West Virginian

by Kevin Stewart

Being a West Virginia writer isn't easy: It takes long hours of sipping wine, eating cheese, staring at a computer screen, and fielding insults.

Because of your wife's job, move to an aristocratic coastal city in a state farther south than West Virginia. Become an adjunct instructor for very little money at the local community college. Split up with wife. The day before spring semester starts, learn that your classes didn't "make."

Fall back on your undergraduate degree, which is marketable: Work as a drafter for a hack home designer and hate it. Three months later, win second prize in a state fellowship sponsored by that Southern state's Academy of Authors. This cheers you up a little.

At the awards banquet, listen to a tribute to a recently deceased famous poet and novelist from the Southern state's flagship university. Eat prime rib and talk to the other writers. Receive your certificate and check and head straight for your favorite bar and drink up the twenty dollar bad check you cashed earlier that day, knowing your fellowship will cover it on Monday.

The next day, go hear the first-place winners read at an art gallery. Try to keep from thinking, "Mine is better," and act enthusiastic because the first-place fiction winner is attractive, though married. Hope that her relationship with her nonwriting husband is headed where your relationship with your nonwriting wife has already gone. Discuss with her the possibility of starting a writer's group, though have no intention of joining said group if it grows beyond two members.

Be told your work is too bleak, too depressing, too violent. Immediately sit down at your keyboard and set a scene in some dark hollow in winter so the trees will be bare and gray, and kill a character, preferably with a sawed-off shotgun or some rusty farm implement.

Sip wine, eat cheese. Meet a soft, gentle, polite elderly couple who runs a bookstore that sells new, used, and hard-to-find books by Southern authors. When asked, tell them you went to the writing program at Arkansas, and they respond that they carry and enjoy the Southern anthology edited for that university's press by a certain writer there. Say that he was your advisor, etc. Think that you still haven't found a hardback copy of a popular novel by a West Virginian and ask whether they have it: "You know, the West Virginia writer…"

"Oh, no," the woman says. She is — they both are — of that soft skin like the inside of your elbow. They are dressed formally in appropriate styles and colors for early spring Sunday afternoon wine-and-cheese literary gatherings. "We wouldn't have that," the woman adds.

Your wit fails you momentarily. You should come back with, "Well, the editor of that Southern anthology saw fit to include West Virginians in it," but you just look at them, thinking you now know how Thomas Sutpen, the character in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom,* felt in Tidewater Virginia. Finally, the second-place winning poet says, as poets are apt to say, "I wish they would let the second-place winners read, too."

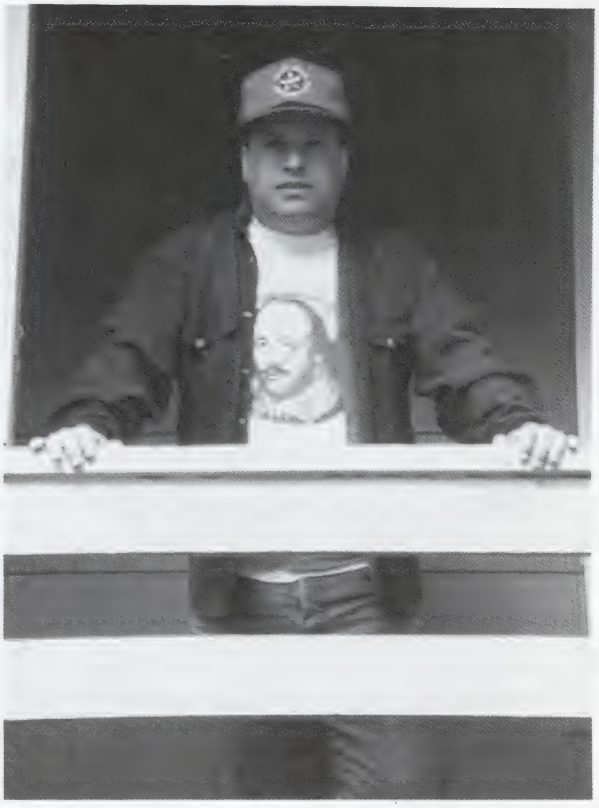
Glance at him, then at the polite elderly couple, and say, "Yeah, marginalized twice in one day already."

Endure the readings, hurry to a local sports bar only to watch your favorite team not even make the Sweet Sixteen. Drink the afternoon away so you can

sleep that night without tossing and turning, dreading going to that drafting job.

Have a friend tell you that in grad school, for her composition for teachers' seminar and practicum, she wrote a paper about dealing with Appalachian dialects when teaching in Appalachia. The paper was to fulfill an assignment on Approaches to Cultural Concerns in the Classroom. She got a B and was told that Appalachia isn't a culture. It's a geographic region.

Also be told by teachers, editors, and agents to consider writing about something else, to change the setting. Be told your work is too bleak, too depressing, too violent. Immediately sit down at your keyboard and set a scene in some dark hollow in winter so the trees will be bare and gray and kill a character, preferably with a sawed-off shotgun or some rusty farm implement. Then delete the scene.



Nat Hardy

Kevin Stewart struggles with lack of recognition for West Virginian writers.

Let another materialize. A couple: They're sitting across from each other at the kitchen table. The man scratches at the wood grain with his fingernail. The woman watches him and wants to cry. He just sits there, watching his finger work the wood grain. She won't let herself cry if he's just going to sit there. The air in that kitchen is almost combustible, like blackdamp in a mine. Struggle with what's missing between them. Know they know something is missing, but they don't say it because you can't name it. Whatever that missing something is, it is the spark that will ignite the tension. But all they can do, and all you can do, is wonder how two people who were once so happy together can come to this — sitting in awkward silence across the kitchen table from each other.

Explain that there are jobs in West Virginia that aren't mine-related. For instance, your old man is blue-collar but self-employed, and his upholstery business has been successful through coal booms and busts. Explain that there are areas of West Virginia that have no coal at all.

Win a West Virginia Commission on the Arts Literary Fellowship and infer from other writers from outside of West Virginia that they could easily have won a fellowship in West Virginia too.

Try to explain why coal mines figure prominently in very little of your work. Explain that only your grandfather and two uncles (out of twelve) worked in the mines. Explain that there are jobs in West Virginia that aren't mine-related. For instance, your old man is blue-collar but self-employed, and his upholstery business has been successful through coal booms and busts. Explain that there are areas of West Virginia that have no coal at all. Try to explain to people who see literature only in sociological terms that your identity doesn't exist only in relation to coal companies and their "exploitation and oppression," words that you would never ever use in a story. Try to tell them there are other stories — many, many other stories. For instance, there are stories about characters who both love and hate where they're from. They hate where they're from because they can't stay there and find fulfilling jobs, thus they have to leave the mountains they love. It's all about love. Tell them the best West Virginia stories are love stories.

Examine a new anthology of Southern lit that actually contains a section devoted to Appalachia. Notice the only West Virginian included is Rebecca Harding Davis, who lived in Wheeling. Where you come from, people figure Wheeling is really in Ohio. Realize that her short story "Life in the Iron Mills" was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1861 when Wheeling was still in Virginia.

Examine a new anthology of Southern lit that actually contains a section devoted to Appalachia. Notice the only West Virginian included is Rebecca Harding Davis, who lived in Wheeling. Where you come from, people figure Wheeling is really in Ohio.

Realize the story is a heartbreaking work but realize it's also heartbreaking not to see included in this anthology Davis Grubb or Mary Lee Settle or Chuck

Kinder or Breece D'J Pancake or Jayne Ann Phillips or Denise Giardina or …

Then notice that — along with African and Native American folktales and myths — Jack tales and derivatives of popular ballads from Scotland and Ireland are not included.

Separated, broke, ten pounds heavier from beer, move back to West Virginia from the aristocratic Southern coastal city, glad to be gone. Think about how, at low tide, the city smells like boiled cabbage, which you remember eating before your old man's business became as successful as it is now. Think about how the city stank of horse piss because of the horse-drawn carriages. The city often smelled acrid because it was downwind from the paper mills. More often than not, this aristocratic city just plain stank. Be thankful for the mountain air.

Go back to work in your old man's shop, work you vowed eight years ago you would never do again. Wait for people to say, "Well, the big writer's back here with the rest of us." But it's not said. No one even asks what happened. Be thankful that the silent, individualistic ways of your family and the other people there won't allow them to pry.

At the end of the day, wash the dirt and grease from your hands and sit at your computer and let the bitterness and anger spew forth into your work and ruin everything you try to write. But let it spew.

At the end of the day, wash the dirt and grease from your hands and sit at your computer and let the bitterness and anger spew forth into your work and ruin everything you try to write. But let it spew. Have the man shoot the woman at the kitchen table. Have the woman shoot the man. Have them shoot at each other until their faces turn blue. Let the shots be metaphorical or real. Let them shoot and shoot and shoot. Eventually they will run out of ammo, and then you can start working that silence that hangs between them.

Read in *USA Today* that West Virginia's high automobile accident fatality rate is clearly due to a higher than normal rate of people who drive while drunk. Then look at a road map of West Virginia and see, as Pancake says, that the road map looks like *a barrel of worms with Saint Vitus' dance.*

Go fish New River. Wade across the head of a slight falls, where large rocks rear diagonally out of the water with the current. Come to a gap in the rocks where most of the current pours through. Face the upstream and try to step across and straddle the water. When your foot reaches the other side, the current catches you. Fishing pole in one hand, your arms windmill. You are swept backward, and you remember all the stories of the river's undercurrents and whirlpools and of people drowning, like your uncle's buddy, Gobel. Holding your breath, cover the back of your head with your free arm. Let the current somersault you beneath the surface of the water. Your shins bang large rocks. Let your feet hit bottom and spring up out of the water, still holding your pole. Swimming in place, take a breath, then collect the plastic bags of plastic bait floating around you and start for shallower water.

However, the river will not be through with you. You are taken under again. This time, you aren't ready. Swallow water and flail limbs. Then be released. Come up, swim till your feet can touch bottom, and wade back to your car, your bags of bait floating toward Hinton. Sit there for a while, allowing your heartbeat to slow. Know that the river has told you something, but at the moment, you're not sure what.

That evening at a friend's, another friend is visiting from Northern Virginia and asks what you are doing these days. Nothing, you say. He tells you he can get you a job in the architectural company he works for — good wages and benefits. You think about that job in the aristocratic coastal city, then kind of shrug. Later, the river's message will strike you: "Get out. You can live here now only in your stories."

Read a *Sporting News* column, in a prediction of the WVU/Miami game: "True story: Morgantown, W.Va., was recently voted the most livable place in America. According to the poll, Morgantown, home of the West Virginia Mountaineers, has — and I'm not making this up — 'a unique mix of small-town charm and big-city flair,' as well as a personal transit system that is 'Appalachia's answer to Disneyland's monorail.'" Read between the dashes, over and over.

Move to Old Town Alexandria, Virginia. Fall back on your drafting degree again and work with your friend in an architectural office for forty hours a week, staring at a computer screen. Find it difficult to go home nights and stare at your own computer screen on which are scrolled your stories. Find yourself not writing and justifying the excuses. Eat, change clothes, go to the bar across the street.

Read in *USA Today* that West Virginia's high automobile accident fatality rate is clearly due to a higher than normal rate of people who drive while drunk. Then look at a road map of West Virginia and see, as Pancake says, that the road map looks like *a barrel of worms with Saint Vitus' dance.*

Listen to the smug yuppie bastard to your left tell jokes — the one about the West Virginia virgin: a twelve-year-old who can outrun her brother; the one about how birds fly upside down over West Virginia because it ain't even worth shitting on; the one about how the drink-

ing age in West Virginia has been raised to thirty-five to keep alcohol out of the public schools; the one about how driver's ed has been cut back to three days a week so the mules can be used for sex ed on Tuesdays and Thursdays …

Elbow him and tell him you don't want to listen to his jokes. When he asks, "Why? Where're you from?" hold up your right hand in a fist, palm toward him, and stick out your middle finger and thumb:

Boyd Carr

He responds in one of two ways:

A. He punches you, and you try to get in as many licks as you can before the bartenders separate you and throw *you* out for starting the fight.

B. He gets it and says, "Sorry," and turns to his buddy and says, "Did you hear about this guy from Arkansas who …"

Elbow him again and say that you went to school in Arkansas. He throws up his arms and says, "O.K. Just forget it."

If A, begin search for a new bar.

If B, savor the little victories and sip your pint of Sierra Nevada.

The next day, get your divorce papers in the mail. Occasionally go home to visit your family.

Listen to a call-in show on WAMU, D.C.'s public radio station. The topic is programming. People call in suggestions. The host is asked why the station plays bluegrass music every evening from three till six. The caller — he says he can understand maybe an hour or two every weekend, but for three hours every evening? Especially with all the real music — classical music — and all the "intellectual" programming they have. Sniggering, the caller says, "Come on! Bluegrass?"

Send out the same old stories you've been sending out for almost two years now. Get one accepted. Get a little confidence. Begin hating your new drafting job more and more. Start looking for teaching jobs. Apply for several. Get an adjunct position in the Shenandoah Valley. Move there and take a substantial cut in pay and benefits, except for one: more time to write. And in that time, you begin to find a little peace.

Return to the couple at the kitchen table, pore over the silence still hanging between them, and dissect it. Examine it particle by particle. Begin to discern a pattern in the silence. Learn why the man can't look at the woman, why he can only scratch at the wood grain on the table with his fingernail. Know he has never really loved, that something other than love has married him to her, that out of guilt, he can't look at her. Know that she did love and know that her love has gone unreturned and has died. Know that this is killing her.

Know that from then on, he has to learn how to love, to be intimate, to know when the silence and independence of his family and the other people back in those mountains can be beneficial and when it can be detrimental. Realize he's beginning to understand the responsibility he has to take in his relationships to the people who matter. Spend your time trying to make this man love, story after story, because, after all, a West Virginia story is always a love story.

Return to the couple at the kitchen table, pore over the silence still hanging between them, and dissect it. Examine it particle by particle. Begin to discern a pattern in the silence.

Kenneth Murray

Looking into the New River Gorge from the Gauley Bridge area of West Virginia near U.S. Highway 19.

In Glen Lynn, Virginia, lean on the railing of the bridge and stare at the center of the New River, only yards before it leaves Virginia and enters West Virginia. Feel the bridge vibrate as the semis rumble past. Feel the mountains hovering around you. Allow one part of you to yearn to implore the water to turn back, to not undo Sutpen's trip to Virginia from what is now West Virginia, to warn the river that once you've touched these mountains, you will be different. Allow another part of you to welcome the waters home. N&T

A native of Princeton, W.Va., Kevin Stewart is a past winner of Now & Then's *Appalachian Fiction Competition and author of the novella* Margot, *winner of the 1999* Texas Review Press' *novella prize, published in February. He is an instructor of writing and literature at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.*

Boyd Carr's illustration first appeared in Appalachian Journal, *vol. 19, no. 1 (Fall 1991), p. 6.* © *1991, Appalachian State University.*

Changeling

by Laura Weddle

"I was born and raised in central Kentucky, and my childhood was spent on tobacco farms where my father was a tenant farmer. Much of my writing centers around that part of the state and the people of that area, probably because so many of my early memories and impressions were formed there.

I spent most of my professional career as a professor of humanities at Prestonsburg Community College in Prestonsburg, Ky., and so have deep roots in the mountains of Appalachia. I consider myself an Appalachian writer and am renewed and invigorated each year when I attend the Appalachian Writers Conference at Hindman, Ky." —LW

Me and Wilma hid in the walnut tree up behind Mr. Ben's house to watch the gypsy wagon come down the road. It had a blue wooden cover painted with white stripes and red flowers with green vines curling around the top and sides. I thought it was beautiful, but Wilma said gypsies only painted their wagons that way to hide how mean they was and to throw people off their tracks. She said Mama knew somebody they had robbed and beat up and left for dead.

That's why we was hiding in the tree.

As the wagon got closer, I could hear bells jingling on the horses' harness. A dark man with a red bandana around his neck held the reins, and the woman beside him dangled her feet over the front of the wagon. Her black hair hung in waves, and gold loops on her ears and arms looked like they was dancing in the sun.

She was the prettiest lady I'd ever seen.

Two girls, maybe six and ten — about mine and Wilma's ages — was sitting in the back. The younger light-haired one laughed and shoved the darker one, pretending to push her out. Just as it looked like she might fall, the first one grabbed her, and they fell back together into the wagon.

Behind them sat an old woman. Thin strands of gray hair hung out from under a long, black scarf, and she held a string of beads in her hands. It looked like she was whispering something to herself and pulling the beads through her fingers. When the wagon got under the tree, right below us, she stared straight up into my eyes and held my gaze until she was too far away to see me any longer. Right then, a chill went down my back, and a cloud passed over the sun. I shivered like it had all of a sudden turned winter.

Me and Wilma tried not to breathe, scared they would hear us and not wanting to think what they might do if they saw us up in the tree. We didn't say a word until they was nearly out of sight.

"Wonder what they're doin' around here?" I scooted over a little to get away from the rough bark that was scraping the bottom of my legs. Wilma grabbed a limb and started to climb down.

"Nobody knows where they come from or where they go when they leave." She picked up a handful of gravel and threw it at a post where a big black crow stood flapping its wings, fixing to take off. We watched it climb high, then swoop down over the cornfield on the other side of the fence.

"Mr. Ben told Daddy they stopped at the store yesterday, and when they left, a twenty-five pound sack of flour and a gallon of lard was gone. Said they stole it slick as a whistle, with Fred Kestal standin' right there. He was so scared they'd get the money in the cash register, he forgot to watch his groceries."

When the wagon got under the tree, right below us, she stared straight up into my eyes and held my gaze until she was too far away to see me any longer. Right then, a chill went down my back, and a cloud passed over the sun. I shivered like it had all of a sudden turned winter.

"Where you reckon they're goin' now?"

"Well, it'll soon be dark, so I guess they'll find a place to stay tonight and move on in the mornin'." She pulled a limb down from the persimmon tree we was passing under, and it made a swishing sound when she turned it loose. "They just camp out wherever it suits 'em."

We speeded up a little, thinking about that wagon stopping somewhere on Mr. Ben's farm, maybe not far from our house. As we ran, I thought I could almost hear it, still jingling along through the dark, shady woods by the lake.

We rounded a curve in the road and saw Mama standing outside, throwing corn to the white leghorn hens and roosters flocking around her legs. When she saw us coming, she lifted the bucket above her head and scattered what was left of the feed in a big wide circle around her.

"You girls're later than I expected. Where've you been?" Wilma walked over to stand next to Mama. Her hair was blonde where Mama's was dark, but both of them had blue eyes and

We speeded up a little, thinking about that wagon stopping somewhere on Mr. Ben's farm, maybe not far from our house. As we ran, I thought I could almost hear it, still jingling along through the dark, shady woods by the lake.

light skin that took on the bright colors of the sun, which was just starting to go down. Sometimes I wished my skin was bright and shining like theirs, but Daddy said I took after my Cherokee grandma and that she was beautiful.

Mama always worried about me and Wilma, and I didn't think we ought to tell her about seeing the gypsies. Sometimes she would meet us with a switch if we stayed gone too long, and we was careful what we told her about some of the things we done. But this time, Wilma was too excited to hold it in.

"Them gypsies passed right under us, Mama. We hid in the walnut tree so they couldn't see us, but we saw them clear as anything. They was two kids and an old woman in the back and a man and woman up front. You should've just seen how their wagon was painted up." She stopped at the look on Mama's face.

"You was that close to them gypsies?" Mama's face had gone pale. "Didn't I tell you to run if you seen 'em comin'?" For a minute, I thought she was going for a switch, but Wilma jumped in and started talking faster.

"They're gone now. They went down the road toward the woods by the lake." She ran over and picked up the feed bucket and started toward the house, with me close behind her. I turned back toward Mama as we got to the door.

Mama always worried about me and Wilma, and I didn't think we ought to tell her about seeing the gypsies.

"You reckon they'll camp down there tonight?" I asked.

"If they do, maybe they'll be gone by tomorrow." She brushed away corn hulls that had stuck to the front of her apron and used the bottom of it to wipe sweat off her forehead. "Anyhow, I don't want you girls off this place until at least day after tomorrow. Give them gypsies plenty of time to get gone."

She opened the screen door on the back porch and called back over her shoulder. "You all go on down and gather up the eggs, then come and help me fix supper."

The chicken house was a little gray shed next to the barn, with rows of nests Daddy had made out of boards and lined with straw. There was a good smell inside, like feathers and shelled corn and wood shavings. We had to scratch around to find the eggs, and the straw felt warm where the hens had sat. When we had found ten, Wilma said that was probably all of them.

"Why do you 'spose Mama's so scared of the gypsies?" I asked as I put the last of the eggs I'd found into the brown basket.

"I guess 'cause they steal things. Even babies, sometimes."

"You mean they steal groceries and babies too?"

"That's what Mama says. She says sometimes they take pretty little light-colored, blue-eyed babies and leave one of their dark, ugly ones." My mind flashed back to the gypsy wagon, and I remembered something. One of the girls was lighter than the other one — almost as light as Wilma.

It wasn't quite dark when Henry Mackey, from the Anderson farm next to Mr. Ben's, come running up the road and pounded on our door. When Daddy got up from the table to see who it was, Henry was standing there panting, and his eyes had the same look I'd seen in Mama's sometimes when one of her scared spells come on her. Before Daddy could say anything, Henry started talking loud, almost hollering.

"John, one of the boys has wandered off, and we can't find him nowhere. George and Tom was playing out by the barn last night, and when we called 'em for supper, George come in and said Tom had run behind the barn after old Shep and didn't

It wasn't quite dark when Henry Mackey, from the Anderson farm next to Mr. Ben's, come running up the road and pounded on our door.

come back around, and now him and the dog're both gone." He stepped inside the house and dropped into a chair beside the kitchen table.

"That was about six o'clock last night, and we've been looking for him all night long and all day today."

Mama poured a cup of coffee and set it down in front of Henry. He didn't seem to see it.

"We've covered ever' inch of ground over on our place, and now we're gonna scour this one." His voice changed, and I could tell he was crying.

"He's just three years old, John. How in the name of God could he've got away that quick?"

Henry's hair was tangled and wet, with little bits of leaves and twigs in it. Sweat and dust had left brown streaks down his face, and there was a scratch with a thin red scab halfway across his forehead.

"We're gettin' all the men on this farm to help us look. Mr. Ben and Duke Clay and Jake Grimes are goin' through the fields where the corn and tobacco's so tall, and Sam Murphy

and Fred Kestal have gone over to the river. I thought maybe you and me could go through them woods by the lake, down below Mr. Ben's house."

What he said next was hard to hear. "John, me and Stella's scared to death."

I had never seen her look like that before. Her face was white, and she was holding the coffeepot handle so tight, her knuckles showed through. Her eyes had turned a darker shade of blue, and she was staring out the window like she didn't know we was there.

Daddy grabbed his hat off the nail by the door. "Mary, you and the girls go on up and stay with Stella, and I'll go with Henry." They was out the door and down the path before I looked at Mama.

I had never seen her look like that before. Her face was white, and she was holding the coffeepot handle so tight, her knuckles showed through. Her eyes had turned a darker shade of blue, and she was staring out the window like she didn't know we was there.

"What's wrong, Mama?" Wilma sounded scared, like I felt.

"They're never gonna find that child," Mama said, not like she was talking to us but to somebody far off. "Them gypsies have done got him and gone."

"What will they do with him, Mama?" I whispered.

"Nobody knows for sure." Her voice had a funny sing-songy sound.

"Sometimes they leave one of their own to trade, and sometimes they just take off and you never see hide nor hair of the child or the gypsies again."

Wilma had grabbed Mama's hand and was pulling her toward the door. "Come on, Mama. Stella needs us to stay with her while they're lookin' for Tom."

"They always come back again, though." Mama still spoke in that strange voice. "Always a different bunch, but gypsies always come back."

Then me and Wilma and Mama was running to get to Stella's, so we could be with her while the men looked for Tom. The sun was a big red ball above the trees, and dark blue shadows covered the Mackey's house and barn up the road in front of us.

Fanny Kestal and Aunt Belle was already there. Fanny had George in the kitchen and was feeding him a biscuit with blackberry jam, and Aunt Belle was holding Stella's hand and talking to her in a low voice. I noticed how black Aunt Belle's hand looked beside Stella's white one and how Stella was gripping it like a drowning person. Stella's hair hung in strings around her face, and her eyes was red and swollen.

"Now you just come over here and lay down and sleep for a little while." Aunt Belle was trying to ease Stella over to the daybed by the door.

"You need to be rested when they bring your boy in." Stella held back like she was afraid if she laid down, she'd somehow miss Tom and never see him again.

Me and Wilma walked out behind Stella's house and climbed up on the fence. Wilma pulled a splinter off the rail beside her and looked off down the road in the direction of the lake. I thought of the bright gypsy wagon I'd seen going behind those trees.

"Wilma, why *is* Mama so scared of them gypsies?" I asked the same question as I had at the chicken house, only now it was because of the awful way Mama had acted when she heard about Tom.

At first, I didn't think Wilma was going to answer, then she leaned over close to me and whispered.

Nancy Earnest

"Mama had another baby once. It was a little blonde-haired girl that died. I was too little to remember, but Aunt Pearl told me about it, and you got to promise me you won't never tell."

I nodded, and Wilma leaned closer. "Aunt Pearl said she never completely got over it. She said there was gypsies then, too. Said they come by our house the day it was born, and Aunt Pearl said Mama thought they marked the baby."

I could feel goose bumps on my arms. "Marked it how?"

"It was born dead, and Mama was so sick, she never got to see it. Aunt Pearl said Mama wouldn't hardly eat or talk or nothin' for a long time." Wilma turned around and looked back toward the house to be sure nobody was listening.

Me and Wilma looked at each other, knowing the question we was both thinking. Wilma spoke up first. It was like she was holding her breath, and the words was low and squeaky.

"Said Mama thought the gypsies got her baby, was the reason she never saw it. Anyway, it wasn't hardly a year till you was born, Lilly, and she got better after that, but she's been scared to death of gypsies ever since."

The light was almost gone when we saw Daddy and Henry coming up the hill. Henry was carrying Tom, and old Shep was running along behind them.

Me and Wilma jumped off the fence and run down to meet them. "Where was he, Daddy?" Wilma yelled, before we got halfway down the hill.

"Down by the lake with Shep and a bunch of gypsies. Looks like he musta chased Shep down the hill and fell and hit his head. He's got a little knot on it, but nothin' to worry about."

Henry hadn't said a word, just kept holding on to Tom like he'd never turn him loose again.

Me and Wilma looked at each other, knowing the question we was both thinking. Wilma spoke up first. It was like she was holding her breath, and the words was low and squeaky.

"Did you say he was with the gypsies, Daddy?"

"Yeah. He was playin' with their little girls and eatin' some kinda sweet bread they'd give him. Feller said they was gonna

The moon was big and yellow, lighting up the path almost like day. We passed the place in the road where we'd last seen the gypsy wagon, but we didn't mention it to Mama and Daddy.

bring him home, but Tom couldn't tell 'em where he lived. Said they was gettin' ready to get in their wagon and bring him to the first house they saw. See if anybody knowed him."

By the time all the neighbors was ready to leave the Mackeys, after making sure that Tom was all right and both boys asleep, me and Wilma and Mama and Daddy started home too. The moon was big and yellow, lighting up the path almost like day. We passed the place in the road where we'd last seen the gypsy wagon, but we didn't mention it to Mama and Daddy.

The bed felt good when we got in it, and I was so sleepy I never remembered pulling the covers up. The moon out our window seemed to be playing hide and seek when the wind blew strands of gray clouds over it and stirred the branches in the oak tree out by the gate.

Sometime in the night, I saw myself in a bright gypsy wagon in the woods. But I was a baby, not six going on seven like now. An old woman with black, shiny eyes bent over me and lifted me out of my warm, soft bed. She carried me through the woods to a house, through a door, and into a room where a pretty, blonde baby was sleeping. I felt her put me in the bed, making it shake as she dropped me. Then she picked up the other baby and slipped out the door and run off into the night.

"Wake up, Lilly. Mama's callin' us for breakfast." My eyes felt heavy, like they didn't want to open, but Wilma was shaking me, and I sat up.

I looked down at Wilma's hand on my arm, and my brown skin and black hair looked darker than ever beside her brightness in the morning sun. I put my hand over hers and held tight while I whispered my question.

"Do you think they really would've brought him back, Wilma?" She waited a minute, and I knew she had been wondering the same thing as me.

"I don't know, Lilly," she said. "Let's go see what Daddy thinks." N&T

Laura Weddle and her husband, Leo, retired from Prestonsburg Community College in 1994 and moved back to Leo's homeplace in Somerset, Ky.

Learning Curve

The weeks were strict, practicing cursive
in the desk Granddad had salvaged.
With the hand-held sander he had erased
curses, initials, couples hitched with a plus

and left a slick surface for my writing tablet.
The exercise pages held county two-lanes,
two solid lines and a broken middle stripe
to help regulate my vowels and consonants.

There began the track of my scrawled record
of unlettered granddaddy and bookless kin,
the elementary roads waiting for my pen's tar,
my looping and circling testament to blood.

—Michael Chitwood

Michael Chitwood is a freelance writer living in Chapel Hill, N.C. Ohio Review Books has published two books of his poetry, Salt Works *(1992) and* Whet *(1995). A third book of poetry,* The Weave Room *(1998), is part of the Phoenix Poets series published by The University of Chicago Press.* Hitting Below the Bible Belt, *a collection of essays, was published by Down Home Press in 1998.*

Prologue to *Clay's Quilt*

by Silas House

They were in a car going over Buffalo Mountain, but the man driving was not Clay's father. The man was hunched over the steering wheel, peering out the frosted window with hard, gray eyes. The muscle in his jaw never relaxed, and he seemed to have an extra, square-shaped bone on the side of his face.

"No way we'll make it without getting killed," the man said. His lips were thin and white.

Clay listened to the tires crunching through the snow and ice as they moved slowly on the winding road. It sounded as if they were driving on a highway made of broken glass.

"We ain't got no choice but to try now," Clay's mother, Anneth, said. "We can't pull over and just set on the side of the road until it thaws."

Clay listened to the tires crunching through the snow and ice as they moved slowly on the winding road. It sounded as if they were driving on a highway made of broken glass. On one side of the road there rose a wall of cliffs, and on the other side was a wooden guardrail. It looked like the world dropped off after that.

They met a sharp curve and the steering wheel spun around in the man's hands. His elbows went high into the air as he tried to straighten the car. The two women in the back cried out "Oh Lord!" in unison as one was thrown atop the other to one side of the car. Anneth pressed her slender fingers deep into Clay's arms, and he wanted to scream, but then the car was righted on course. The man looked at Anneth as if it were her fault.

The women in the back had been carrying on all the way up the mountain, and now they laughed wildly at themselves for being scared. They acted like going over the crooked, ice-covered highway was the best time they had had in ages, and the man kept telling them to shut up. It seemed they lit one cigarette after another, so many that Clay couldn't tell if the mist swirling around in the cab of the car was from their smoking or their breathing.

The heater in the little car didn't work and when one of the women hollered to the man to give it another try, the vents rattled and coughed, pushing out a chilling breeze. Clay could see his own breath clenching out silver in front of him until it made a white fist on the windshield. The man wiped the glass off every few minutes, and when he did, he let out a line of cusswords, all close and connected like a string of paper dolls.

Anneth exhaled loudly and said, "I'd appreciate it if you didn't cuss and go on like that in front of this child."

"Well, God almighty," the driver said. "I ain't never been in such a mess before in my life."

Clay knew that his mother was getting mad because a curl of her hair had suddenly fallen down between her eyes. She

Nancy Fischman

pushed it away roughly, but it fell back again.

"They ain't no use taking the Lord's name in vain. I never could stand to hear that word," she said. She patted Clay's hands and focused on the icy highway. "Sides, you ought to be praying instead of handling bad language."

"Yeah, you're a real saint, ain't you, Anneth Sizemore?" the man said, and a laugh seemed to catch in the back of his throat. He pulled his shoulders up in a way that signaled he was ready to stop talking. Clay watched him hold tightly to the steering wheel and look out at the road without blinking. He knew this man somehow, but couldn't figure how exactly, and he didn't feel right with him. He wished that his father had been driving them. He reconsidered and simply wished he could put a face to the word *daddy.* He was only four, but he had already noticed that most of his cousins had fathers, while his was never even spoken of. He wondered if his father would smell so strongly of aftershave, like this man, and have a box-bone in his cheek that tightened every few minutes. He started to ask his mother about this but didn't. He had so many questions. Today alone, he couldn't understand what all had gone on.

Clay looked out at the snow and wondered if the world had stopped. Maybe it had frozen, grown silver like the creek water around the edges of rocks. They had not met one car all the way over the mountain, and the few houses they passed looked empty. No tracks on the porches, no movement at the windows. Thin little breaths of black smoke slithered out of chimneys, as if the people had left the fires behind.

The windows frosted over again, and Anneth took the heel of her gloved hand and wiped off the passenger window so they could look out. The pines lining the road were bent low and pitiful, full of clotted ice and winking snow. Some of the trees had broken in two. Their limbs stuck out of the packed snow like jagged bones with damp, yellow ends bright against the whiteness. There was not so much sunshine as daylight, but the snow and ice twinkled anyway. The cliffs had frozen into huge boulders of ice where water had trickled down to make icicles.

"Look," Anneth said, "them icicles look like the faces of people we know."

She whispered into Clay's ear and pointed out daggers of ice. The one with the big belly looked like Gabe. One column of ice looked like a woman with wigged-up hair, just like his aunt Easter. There was even one that favored the president, who was on television all of the time. Clay put his hands inside hers. The blue leather gloves she had on were cold to his bare hands. He didn't move, though, and hoped the warmth of her fingers would seep down into his own.

"I need to get this baby some mitts," Anneth said, to no one in particular. The women were singing, and the driver was ignoring every one of them. "His little hands is plumb frostbit."

She undid the knot at her neck and slid the scarf around her collar with one quick jerk. The scarf was white, with fringes on each end. She shook out her hair and picked at it with one hand. The car was filled with the smell of strawberries. She always washed her hair in strawberry shampoo, except on Fridays, when she washed it with beer. She took his hands and lay the scarf out across her lap, then wound the scarf round and round his hands, like a bandage.

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"I'm awful ashamed to have on gloves and my baby not," she said as she worked with the scarf. "There," she said. There was a fat white ball in Clay's lap where his arms should have met.

One of the women in the back put her chin on the top of the front seat. "I hain't never seen a vehicle that didn't have a heater *or* a radio. This beats it all to hell."

The man shot her a hateful look in the rearview mirror.

She fell back against her seat and began to sing "Me and Bobby McGee." The other woman joined in and they swayed back and forth with their arms wrapped around each other's necks. Their backs smoothed across the leather seat in rhythm with the windshield wipers. They snapped their fingers and cackled out between verses.

"Help us sing, Anneth!" one of them cried out. "I know you like Janis Joplin."

Anneth ignored them, but she hummed the song quietly to Clay, patting his arm to keep in tune.

The man said that he would never make it off the downhill side of the mountain without wrecking and killing them. There was more arguing over the fact that they couldn't pull over. They would surely freeze to death sitting on the side of the road. They were on top of the mountain now, far past the row of houses. There was nothing here but the black trees and gray cliffs and mountains that stretched out below them. Everybody started talking at once, and it reminded Clay of the way the church house sounded just before the meeting started.

Clay looked over his mother's shoulder at the women. One of the women was looking at herself in a silver compact and patting the curls that fell down on either side of her face. She snapped the compact shut with a loud click and looked up at him happily.

"Don't worry, Clay," she said. "We'll make it off this mountain." He could see lipstick smudged across her straight white teeth.

The other woman stared blankly into space, and it took her a long moment to realize that Clay was studying her. She was beautiful, much younger than his mother, but as Clay looked at her, she aged before his eyes. Her face grew solid and tough, her skin like a persimmon. Her eyes looked made of water, her nose lengthened and thinned, and her mouth pinched together tightly. He caught a glimpse of what would never become of her, because she was killed that day, alongside his mother and the man driving the car.

The man's voice was suddenly harsh. "Well, I was good enough to take you over there, now dammit. I need to pull off and calm down some," he said loudly. "My nerves is shot all to hell."

"I'll never ask you to do nothing else

for me, then," she said with disgust. "I ain't worried about myself—I have to get this baby home."

"Hellfire, I'd rather be home, too, but this road is a sight," he said. "You ought not got that child out in this. I'm pulling over, and that's all there is to it."

"Go on, then," Anneth shouted in a deep voice. She turned toward the window and didn't speak to him again.

"Let's just set here a few minutes and figure something out," the driver said.

Everyone had grown silent looking out at the hills, and later this struck Clay as strange. They were all accustomed to seeing hills laid out before them, but there was something strange about this day, something about how silently the mountains lay beneath the snow.

The shoulder widened out and they could see the mountains spread out below. The white guardrail was wound about by dead vines that showed in brown places through the thick snow. The mountains looked like smudges of paint, rolling back to the horizon until they faded into one another in a misted-over heap.

Anneth wiped the icy window off once more and said, "Look how peaceful. Look at them mountains, how purple and still."

Clay knew that the mountains looked purple under that big, moving sky, but they didn't look still at all to him. They seemed to be breathing—rising so slowly, so carefully, that no one noticed but him. He watched them, concentrating the way he did when he was convinced a shadow had moved across the bedroom wall. It seemed to Clay that they rose and fell with a single pulse, as if the whole mountain chain was connected.

Everyone had grown silent looking out at the hills, and later this struck Clay as strange. They were all accustomed to seeing hills laid out before them, but there was something strange about this day, something about how silently the mountains lay beneath the snow.

It was so quiet that Clay was certain that the end of the world had come. Everybody on earth had been sucked up into the sky in the twinkling of an eye. He was used to hearing people talk about the End and the Twinkling of an Eye; his Aunt Easter constantly spoke of such things. She looked forward to the day when Jesus would part the clouds and come after His children. "Rapture," she called it, and the word was always whispered. Easter said if you weren't saved, you'd be left behind.

He pressed against his mother and felt the warmth of her body spread out across his back. She ran her fingers through his hair and began to hum softly again. He could feel the purr of her lungs against his face. It was the same song the women had been singing. Clay knew it by heart. He'd watched his mother iron or wash dishes while she listened to that song. Sometimes she would snatch him up and dance around the room with him while the song was on the record player. She had sung every word then, singing especially loud when it got to the part about the Kentucky coal mines. The vibration in her chest was as comforting as rain on a tin roof, and he fought his sleep so that he could feel it. She must have thought he was asleep, too, because finally she took her hand from his head and stopped humming.

She pressed her face to the window, leaning her forehead against the cold glass. "I ain't never seen it so quiet on this mountain," she said.

That was the last thing Clay was aware of, but afterward, he sometimes dreamed of blood on the snow, blood so thick that it ran slow like syrup and lay in stripes across the whiteness, as if someone had dashed out a bucket of paint. NeT

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Balancing Act

An Interview with Silas House

by Jane Harris Woodside

Being an Appalachian writer feels most days like walking a tightrope, says 29-year-old Silas House, whose first novel, *Clay's Quilt,* has readers of fiction throughout the region and the nation sitting up and taking notice. "To portray the region honestly without perpetuating stereotypes—it's incredibly hard," notes House.

"I thought about it, especially when I was revising. I sure didn't want to perpetuate anything negative, but I also couldn't leave anything out just for the sake of being politically correct. It wouldn't have been honest."

In language that is both precise and lyrical, House tells the story of Clay Sizemore, a young man coming of age in the late 1990s. He lives in a small Eastern Kentucky community just off the Interstate and not far from a Wal-Mart. Raised by a clairvoyant Pentecostal aunt and a poker-playing, hard-drinking uncle, Sizemore is a coal miner whose musical tastes run from the old ballad "Barbara Allen" to Dolly Parton to Paganini. "I wanted his character to represent old Appalachia meeting new Appalachia," explains the Lily, Ky., native.

Clay is trying to find his place in the world while healing the profound wounds

> "I had plenty of chances to leave and get good jobs, but my love for family was stronger than my desire to succeed."

inflicted by his having witnessed as a young child the murder of his vivacious, reckless, loving mother, Anneth. It's an event obliquely recounted in the novel's

Clay's Quilt
by Silas House

Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill
Chapel Hill, N.C. – 2001
$22.95 (hardcover)

With *Clay's Quilt,* Silas House establishes himself as a potent new literary force. It is a luminous debut, wrought with considerable skill and the apparent ease of a born storyteller.

Clay Sizemore, a young coal miner in Black Banks, Ky., has only fleeting impressions of the car trip 25 years before that ended with his mother's being murdered on a frozen mountaintop. Brought that night to his Aunt Easter's house on Free Creek, he has been raised under her loving, watchful eye, surrounded by an extended family of cousins, aunts, uncles, and his mother's friends.

Although he feels a strong bond to them and to the place where he's grown up, he won't feel complete without some answers to the mystery surrounding his mother's life and death. In a beautifully crafted passage central to the book's theme, he watches his uncle make a quilt and yearns to piece together the scraps of his mother's life in the same way so that he might "have a whole that he could pull up to his neck and feel warm beneath."

Clay's searching, though never far from his thoughts, doesn't prevent him from living fully and passionately in the present among a lively, colorful group of family and friends — his beloved Aunt Easter, clairvoyant, a fervent Pentecostal; his marathon poker party host Uncle Gabe, whose daughter, Dreama, is like a sister to him; and his best friend and honky-tonk partner, Cake. House's deft characterizations quickly make these and others in the book people we care about. When Clay meets the lovely and passionate fiddler, Alma, he begins to envision a future, but they must deal with his past — and hers — before they can claim their life together.

Clay's Quilt, in the truest sense of the word, delights — in its surprises, in its aliveness, in the music accompanying the story, and perhaps most of all in the writer's unique phrasing. House's loving attention to the details of the natural world makes for some exquisitely beautiful moments. In a few simple words, he creates a landscape as immediate as an impressionist painting, as when "peach light stands like steam along the horizon" or infuses the elements with palpable menace — "the air stood still and frozen, like curtains of ice." In a remarkable church scene, his choice of opening words is so exactly right — "God was loose in the church house … " — that the core of Pentecostal worship is immediately clear and its particular exuberant expression inevitable and understandable to anyone. This is powerful writing.

Themes commonly found in the region's literature — the yearning toward meaningful faith, love of land, fierce loyalty to family, acceptance of the supernatural, even the foot-tapping, soul-sweetening, pure joy of music as well as violence, mining, intoxication, and ugly blots on the landscape — are important threads shaping his story. However, House never tries to sell us on Appalachia's virtues, nor does he defend its vices. He presents it as it is — and furthermore, as it is now. Wal-Marts and satellite dishes have replaced the odious scars of strip mining, and more modern drugs of choice have taken the place of moonshine. Violence is no more endemic to the region than it is in abusive relationships and big city streets all over America. You can only hope that works like *Clay's Quilt* will eventually put out of business the social activists who, firmly entrenched with a stereotypical view of Appalachia, insist on finding only what they seek — be it quaint, God-fearing, isolated mountaineers or degenerate, inbred pockets of dire poverty — and not the truth.

Clay's Quilt is a multilayered work. After the hard-hitting prologue [see page 20], I found it a little difficult to settle into the more gentle pace of the main body of the narrative, but it quickly proved to have a power of a different kind. The extensive use of dialect, while probably essential, was at times distracting, but I can find little fault with the novel's construction and pace. It compares favorably with some first novels by writers who have now become household names. *Clay's Quilt* is also valuable social commentary, and the mystery that runs through it is enough to make it a compelling read.

But Silas House gives us something richer and deeper — a wonderfully heartfelt tale of a particular people in a particular place whose struggles and triumphs make them so fully human that their story affirms the universal nature of human experience.

— Genie Jacobson

Genie Jacobson is from Knott County, Ky., and many of her ancestors were educated at the Hindman Settlement School. She is a freelance writer and editor in Irvine, Calif.

prologue. But because his mother's family and friends are too traumatized to speak about her and the circumstances of her death, even 25 years later, her son is grieving over the loss of a person he can't quite remember. If only he can piece together what happened to his mother and understand why, then perhaps he can once again feel protected and warmed by her presence.

Appalachian Roots

House has an impeccable Appalachian pedigree. His family has lived in Laurel County in the Kentucky coalfields "for as long as anybody can remember." His father's people were German and Irish. Until lately, he thought his mother's were a combination of Irish and Cherokee. However, during recent genealogical research, he's discovered that the maternal great-grandmother he thought was full-blooded Cherokee appears on the Melungeon census instead. Melungeons are a mixed-race people of the Southern Appalachians. "We're still trying to figure that out," says House.

His childhood was spent "surrounded by so many stories, and people who knew how to tell stories. When the family got together, you know, we didn't sit around and watch *All in the Family.* We talked. My family, they're storytellers — and I think I'm just the one who decided to write them down instead. I'm not half the storyteller some of my family members are."

House's father, Duke, headed north looking for work in Michigan after returning stateside from Vietnam. "But he just couldn't stand it up there, *thank God,* and he came home," his son says. Once back in Lily, his father found a job in a

new fiberglass factory, while his mother worked in the elementary school cafeteria so she could keep an eye on him. "She was very protective."

Almost all of House's family lives within about a mile of one another. He was raised next-door to two cousins, whom people assumed were his brother and sister. "If we were true brother and sister, I don't think we could be any closer," says House. "One day, my mom would cook, the next day, her sister would cook, and we'd go back and forth. They would stay the night with me, or I would stay the night with them. Our homes were interchangeable." His "sister" moved about 20 minutes away from the rest of the clan. "We have just grieved that she moved over there because it seems so far when you're used to seeing somebody every day of your life."

> "A family member being murdered is something completely different from a family member dying. It completely changes everything."

House began his studies at Sue Bennett College in nearby London, Ky., where he edited the school paper, then transferred to Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) in Richmond, where he earned an English degree in 1994. While at EKU, he commuted 45 minutes each way. "I couldn't bear to be away from my family," House says. "When I graduated from college, I had plenty of chances to leave and get good jobs, but my love for family was stronger than my desire to succeed. It would be really hard for me to live away from this place.

"I think that's one way Appalachians are different from the nation at large. We are more roots-oriented. We find comfort in familiarity with the land and the people." Given his family history, the young writer is not particularly alarmed about the exodus of his peers from the region. "I don't think my generation is any more apt to leave than any other generation. Maybe that's naïve of me, but I really do believe that. My grandparents went north for work. They came back. My parents did the same. Already a lot of people who graduated from high school with me and left have already returned. Even though there may have been better jobs elsewhere, they found it didn't matter. They weren't happy being away from here."

Eventually, House discovered a way both to stay near family and achieve success: He has taken a job delivering mail in rural areas in and around London and then writes in the early afternoon. When asked if he hasn't grown weary of talking about the novelty of a novelist working as a mailman, he laughs and admits, "Well, yeah, I guess I am. But that's done really well for me; I think it's gotten me a lot of publicity I wouldn't have had otherwise," referring to a brief feature in the May 11, 2001, issue of *USA Today* and an extensive interview in the March 17, 2001, edition of Louisville, Ky.'s *Courier-Journal.* "And I do think it's a really, really good job for a writer. I just sit in my truck and put mail in the box. I get to spend a lot of time by myself."

Once he's put all that mail in all those boxes, he comes home to his wife, Teresa, and two daughters, five-year-old Cheyenne and three-year-old Olivia. When not working at Lowe's, Teresa House does public relations for her husband. "Wal-Mart doesn't usually carry literary fiction, but she actually managed to get *Clay's Quilt* into every Wal-Mart store in Kentucky," boasts her proud spouse. Due in part to Wal-Mart's huge order, the novel's first printing sold out by the publication date. "So I can't say enough about how supportive she's been."

Taking On Stereotypes

When House would tell friends about the story's plot, they saw parallels between Clay and his creator. The writer adamantly insisted that the book wasn't autobiographical. But now that he's read the manuscript during the publishing process "a couple hundred times — much more than I wanted to," he concedes they might have had a point. "I realize it's quite autobiographical. Actually," he corrects himself, "it's not so much about me. I think it's a biography of my family."

The chapter in the House family history that most clearly served as the catalyst for *Clay's Quilt* was the murder of his maternal uncle, Jack Hoskins, nearly 20 years ago. Hoskins and his killer had

Stewart Bowman © The (Louisville, Ky.) Courier-Journal

Delivering mail gives author Silas House plenty of time alone to think.

been gambling. "You know, it's happened a million times," House recounts. "The man said he had lost too many times, they had an argument, and, as my Uncle Jack turned to leave, the guy shot him." His uncle left behind three children, the youngest a nine-year-old who was affected the most. She served in part as the inspiration for the character of Dreama, Clay's cousin.

"What I really hope I did in *Clay's Quilt* is to break a stereotype about violence in Appalachia. So often, people here are portrayed as a very violent people who have no remorse."

> "I wanted to show that not every coal miner is angry at the coal mine owner, that not every miner is on strike. That's just another stereotype."

House sees his book as an indictment of violence. "That's what I tried for it to be. I wanted to show how violence really tears apart a family. You know, a family member being murdered is something completely different from a family member dying. It completely changes everything. My family was never ever the same after that."

He was apprehensive when the cousins who were Hoskins' children read *Clay's Quilt.* "But they really loved what I'd done. Even though it's the mother who gets killed in the book, everyone in my family has seen the novel as a tribute to my uncle. They think of it as keeping his spirit alive," says the author.

Where does he think the violence that Appalachia is so famous for comes from? "We're a strong-willed and a very passionate people, and sometimes those passions turn into criminal passions. We don't take things. We stand up for ourselves. But," cautions the Eastern Kentucky native, "I don't think Appalachia is any more violent than any other place in America. I really don't. I think the violence here is more shocking to people because we're seen as such a simplistic culture when, in fact, we're a very complex culture.

"I really get my dander up when people refer to Appalachia as being this simple, utopian, back-in-time place. It's not. We're not that isolated. There's a satellite dish on every hillside. We're in touch with the larger world — whether people want to believe that or not. I think a lot of times we choose not to follow the larger world just because we're an independent people by nature. But we're completely aware of what's going on."

Another stereotype House has taken on in the book has raised the dander of some critics. Clay Sizemore is a coal miner who is basically satisfied with his lot. "I wanted to show that not every coal miner is angry at the coal mine owner, that not every miner is on strike. That's just another stereotype: that all coal miners are treated horribly. It's just not true."

House had family members who worked in the mines before they played out in the 1980s. "They loved their jobs. I know that's not a very popular way to talk about coal mining, but it was true for me and I can only write from what I know. They loved the fellowship in the mines, and it was good money. My family was lucky to have worked for companies that treated them really well. Some people have come down hard on me for that, and I don't understand that. There are plenty of people in Appalachia who were happy in the mines." He is, however, concerned by the environmental consequences of coal mining.

Churches & Honky-tonks

Throughout the book, Clay Sizemore is not simply trying to discover the particular circumstances of his mother's murder. Her murder raises a much larger question: Why do human beings do such horrible things to each other? That question, embedded in the story of her death, propels Clay on a spiritual quest, a search House knows well.

House was raised by what he describes as liberal Pentecostals, parents who allowed him to go to carnivals and movies, for instance. ("When I say 'liberal Pentecostal,' most people say, 'Well, *that's* an oxymoron,'" he chuckles.) Being brought up as a Pentecostal meant that he was surrounded, in his words, by the "most faith-filled, devout people there are." Still, he notes, most Pentecostal teenagers he knows eventually rebel. House was no exception.

"I don't know why — and maybe it's just the people I associate with — but everyone I know who's my age, we all have a problem with organized religion. Yet at the same time, we really want to be more spiritual. We want to be more in touch with God. I really am searching for more faith. I long to have the faith my parents had, an incredible faith that a higher power had everything under control. I wish I could be more comfortable with that."

House is one of those people for whom the terms *spiritual* and *religious* overlap but aren't synonymous. "I think being religious is going to church every time the door's cracked, that religion has a lot more to do with a form of organization than spirituality does. As a spiritual person, I think you can see God everywhere."

The two centers of Clay's world are the honky-tonks he frequents and the church services that are still so much a part of his family's life. But those two poles aren't as far apart as you might expect. "I was real conscious of doing that," says House. "Having been raised Pentecostal, I would see that people in church were so passionate and happy. Then when I rebelled, it was shocking to go out and party in a honky-tonk and find that the people there were so passionate and happy. Both the Pentecostal ceremony and the honky-tonk are forms of celebration. And while the Pentecostals are celebrating God and the honky-tonkers are celebrating the world, to a spiritual person, there's not much difference because God and the world are the same."

> "I long to have the faith my parents had, an incredible faith that a higher power had everything under control. I wish I could be more comfortable with that."

Music also unites the religious and profane worlds in *Clay's Quilt.* "Now that I'm older, I can't accept some of the Pentecostal doctrines. But I also have a really hard time going to other churches because the music there is just so dull. I was raised with this pumping, grinding

music that was fast and so good that you could really dance to it—though you weren't supposed to."

Music not only serves as an important structural device in the novel, it also played a role in the book's creation. "Music's something I really enjoyed using in the book," says House. "For one thing, I feel like this book is about a very passionate group of people, and there's no better expression of passion than music.

"I think the music really moves the book along. And I played all this music while I was writing it. A lot of writers think that's really strange because they can't write with music. It messes with their rhythm. But for me, it created my rhythm. If you look at the book closely, you can see that if I mention a really fast song, the pace of the writing picks up."

Moving Forward

By the novel's conclusion, after Clay has solved the mystery that haunted his young life, he realizes that even with all

> "I grew up hanging onto a past that really wasn't mine. And maybe that's why Clay does the same thing—in a very different way."

he's discovered about Anneth and her world, she is lost to him forever. Still, as he struggles to overcome the obstacles to starting a life with the spirited fiddler, Alma, he finds he can move on.

"You know, I grew up hanging onto a past that really wasn't mine. And maybe that's why Clay does the same thing—in a very different way," House muses. Preserving an Appalachian heritage often translates into keeping a past alive when determined people lived through hard times. "I grew up with the sense of having had it much better than my parents did. I think the thing I'm proudest of is that my family came from absolutely nothing, and now they're decidedly middle-class. They have what they want and need—and they got it all on their own, with no handouts. But I felt guilty that I hadn't lived through the poverty they did."

The trick, then, is for the young to figure out which values and beliefs they will choose to adopt, beliefs and values they've inherited from a past that doesn't happen to be their own history. It's probably an especially difficult challenge in a region that has seen as much change as Appalachia has in the past generation or two. House hopes that the story of Clay's tackling these personal issues will serve as a metaphor for what he calls the "new Appalachia and the old Appalachia." Says House, "You hear all these things about how we're losing our heritage, we're losing our culture. In much the same way that Clay is trying to hold onto his mother, I think we're trying to hold onto these old traditions but also accept progress and the new traditions. I really wanted to show that these people were trying to move forward but also hold onto what was so important to them. I don't know if that comes through very clearly in the book, but that's one thing I was trying to do. I think that whole theme is very Appalachian."

And so as he awaits the paperback publication of *Clay's Quilt* by Ballantine in the spring of 2002 and works on his second novel, *The Parchment of Leaves,* about an early 20th century Cherokee woman, he will continue to try to walk that tightrope—between old and new traditions, between the past and the present, debunking stereotypes while not denying some of the unpleasant truths they express. With any luck, he'll keep his balance, as he has in *Clay's Quilt,* by looking long and hard at the people he loves just as they are and the world as it is and reporting back to us as honestly as he can in graceful, restrained images. N&T

Jane Harris Woodside is editor-in-chief of Now & Then.

Bread

I am flour in a huge sack
on the kitchen chair.

Granny's coffee cup scoops
me into her pan's canyon.

Broken cakes of gray yeast,
warm water, salt and milk.

Her hands squeeze, spank and shape.
I do not cry. I lick her fingers.

Under a dish towel tent,
I sleep, the radio's song "Sixteen Tons."

Now, wind wakes the sail,
the magic cloud puffs up.

My bosoms make the house smell good,
everybody says so.

The oven is a church,
Granny's knife, a bow tuning a fiddle.

My brothers and sisters sing, *loaves, rolls,*
give me the heel, a spoon for jam.

The mouth's sweet cave, the empty shroud,
this, the reason I was born.

—Jeanne Bryner

Jeanne Bryner is a practicing emergency room nurse and a 1996 graduate of Kent State University's Honors College with a bachelor's degree in English. Kent State University Press published her chapbook, Breathless, *in 1995.* Blind Horse *(Bottom Dog Press), Bryner's new book, which tells the story of her family's migration from West Virginia's coalfields to Ohio's steel mills, was published in October 2000. Her prose and poetry have appeared in numerous publications.*

Fences

by James Alan Riley

"'Fences' is from a collection of stories I have been working on for a number of years entitled 'Songs From the Second Marriage.' The stories all deal with the adjustments, difficulties, and ultimate rewards of raising a blended family. 'Fences' is a story about our oldest son leaving home. It is one of my personal favorites from the collection." —JAR

Jason wasn't looking forward to rebuilding the fence around his yard, but at least he knew what he was up against when it came to building fences. It was a job that had to be done in stages, one slow step at a time, which is how Jason worked best, measuring the slope with a chalkline and level, setting his stakes. He had just finished cutting the old chain-link away with wirecutters, and he was standing out in the sun with a pickax in one hand and a shovel in the other. It was only a matter of time, a handful of metal poles jutting bare from the ground at the edge of the road. Those last few poles were all that was left to separate the highway from the house, the humidity rising in waves from the slick pavement where his oldest son, Isaac, was fighting with an armload of tangled wire, dragging it through the grass.

"I want to make my own decisions," Isaac said. He let go of what was left of the old fence, kicked at the loose pile, and came back across the yard. "I'm not a kid anymore, you know. I'm eighteen years old."

"The next thing we have to do is dig up these poles," Jason said. "It won't be easy. They're set in concrete that thick …" He held the shovel out in his hand to demonstrate.

Isaac looked at the tops of his shoes. He slid his hands in his pockets.

"One step at a time," Jason said. "You have to be realistic."

"I *am* being realistic," Isaac said. "You're the one living in dreamland."

Jason felt his grip on the ax tighten.

"Just the same," he said slowly.

He wanted to say more, but he turned instead and looked at the fence, the corner pole twisted and bent where Isaac had slammed into it with the family car when he was first learning to drive. Jason could still hear the raw scrape of metal down the side of his new Oldsmobile as it lunged forward and shuddered to a sudden stop, the corner pole buckled over the hood on the passenger's side.

"There's another pedal down there," Jason said. "Maybe you should try using it."

Jason hadn't expected to be having this conversation so soon, though he had known for some time it was coming. He had felt it moving between them like sound of a door being slammed, an electric guitar blasting the walls.

"What?" Isaac said, totally dumbfounded.

"The brake," Jason said. "Try using your frickin' brake!"

He had to crawl out the driver's side door to inspect the damage. Isaac followed after him in that silent way teenagers have when they've done something only a teenager would do. There was an area about the size of a man's fist on the right front fender that didn't have a scratch on it.

"You missed a spot," Jason said, pointing.

It was the only thing he could think of to say.

By the time Isaac had learned to drive, there wasn't much

fence left not mangled and twisted or half knocked from the ground.

"I hit the fence again," he would say on his way through the house after school, or he'd come out of his bedroom at night, look around like he was seeing everything for the first time and say, "There was another scratch on the car, Dad."

Something about the way Isaac used the past tense made whatever he said seem insignificant, as if saying something had happened in the past were the same as saying it had never happened at all.

Eventually, Jason didn't even get up. He didn't go outside to investigate the damage or ask the same pointless questions. He just sat wherever he was and kept on doing whatever he was doing, watching the television or reading the newspaper or calculating his car insurance and multiplying his premiums by the speed of light.

Isaac bent down and picked up the shovel. He leaned against the handle as if he were testing the ground with his own weight. It was obvious he had thought a long time about what he wanted to say.

By the time Isaac had learned to drive, there wasn't much fence left not mangled and twisted or half knocked from the ground.

"You left home when you were eighteen," he said finally.

The ground at Jason's feet seemed to rise up away from the road. He knew where the conversation was going.

"That was different," he said. He swung the pick up over his shoulder, heaving the dead weight of the thing in a high arc at the ends of his arms. The blade hit the ground with a thud.

"Damn," he said, grabbing his back.

Isaac took the pick from his hands.

"Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Jason said. "It's nothing."

Isaac gave him a disappointed look.

"It's not as hard as you make it sound," he said.

Jason stretched his shoulders. He backed away, bent at the knees and put one hand on the ground.

"Yes, it is," he said.

Jason hadn't expected to be having this conversation so soon, though he had known for some time it was coming. He had felt it moving between them like sound of a door being slammed, an electric guitar blasting the walls.

Jason had eased the door to Isaac's room open. Isaac was sitting on the bed, listening to his headphones.

"I need your help with the fence," Jason yelled. He exaggerated each word with his lips. "We have work to do."

Isaac hadn't been out of his room in weeks. He lifted the headphones from one ear.

"What's that?"

"We have work to do," Jason said, "on the fence."

Isaac set his headphones on the bed.

"Whatever you say," he said.

"I don't care what you had planned," Jason said. "It has to be … What did you just say?"

"I said sure," Isaac said. "Whatever you want, Dad."

Jason could feel the doorknob cool in the palm of his hand. Did he just call me "Dad?" he thought. He had learned to be suspicious of Isaac in a good mood. It could only mean trouble, and a wave of dread washed over him as he backed out the door. He felt each breath leave his body.

"I'll be waiting in the yard," he said.

Isaac had been out of high school for two months, and Jason knew he would eventually have to get a job, but it never occurred to him that he might move away from home to get it. Isaac had had only one real job in his life. He was a dishwasher after school in a local steakhouse.

Jason purposefully exaggerated how proud he was, talking about responsibilities and financial obligations as he dropped Isaac off at the employees' entrance that first night. Secretly, Jason wanted Isaac to hate responsibilities and financial obligations, thinking a healthy distaste for manual labor the best motivation for going on to college.

"In a few years, you'll probably be the head cook," he said. "And then, if you're lucky, you'll make cashier."

"Lighten up," Isaac said, getting out of the car. "I'm only washing dishes."

He leaned back in the open door.

"I love you, too," Jason said, without thinking.

Isaac gave him a strange look.

"I get off at twelve," he said.

The next night, the whole family had settled in to watch television, the light outside the house beginning to turn gray.

"What time do you go to work tonight?" Jason asked. It had only just occurred to him that Isaac had a job.

Isaac didn't even look up. "I don't know," he said. "They gave me the night off."

Secretly, Jason wanted Isaac to hate responsibilities and financial obligations, thinking a healthy distaste for manual labor the best motivation for going on to college.

He got up without another word and went to his room. There was the muffled sound of a television coming on beneath the bang of an electric guitar.

Jason followed him through the house. He opened the bedroom door.

"The night off?" he said. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"How should I know?" Isaac said.

Jason opened the door a little further. "Did you do something wrong?"

Isaac's fingers played silently at the strings of his guitar, the television blaring.

"I'm trying to watch television," he said. "Do you mind?"

Jason reached down and turned the television off.

"I want the truth," he said. "Why aren't you working tonight?"

Isaac rolled his eyes.

"Because I'm not," he said. "O.K.?"

He began to strum the guitar in earnest, a death metal tune that ended the conversation with a jagged flat chord.

That hadn't been so long ago, and now Isaac was helping with the fence and talking a mile a minute about moving to Lexington.

Jason did his best to discourage him. "I guess there's plenty of restaurants in Lexington," he said. "If you get fired from each restaurant after the first night, it'll be weeks before you're out of a job."

"Be serious, Dad," Isaac said. "It's only two hours away."

"I know how far away it is," Jason said. "That's not the point."

He kept talking about what it would be like to move away from home and live on his own. He kept saying the same things over and over again, as if somehow that were going to help.

Isaac was leaning against the handle of the pick. "So what's the point?"

"The point is …" Jason said, trying desperately to think of the point.

"The point is there is no point," Isaac said. "Why don't you just admit it?"

Jason felt his back stiffen.

"The point is you can't afford it," he said, a little too slowly to be convincing. "You'll have to pay rent and utilities. And you'll need a car, which means even more money for gas and insurance, not to mention repairs."

"That's what the job is for," Isaac said. "Everyone has to pay bills. And besides, you'd rather I get a job and live in Lexington than sit around here doing nothing all day, wouldn't you?"

Jason pried a clod of dirt from the ground with the shovel. A white block of cement appeared beneath the brown grass.

"What about college?" he said. "Have you thought anymore about school?"

Isaac didn't say anything at first. He swung the pick up in the air and struck the ground near the concrete block.

"I thought about it," he said finally. "But it won't do any good if I don't want to be there. I'd only flunk out."

It was Jason's turn not to say anything. He watched the blade of the pick as it dug at the ground, pulling up chunks of dirt from the concrete around the pole, the hole growing steadily deeper as Isaac worked. He made it look so easy, the muscles in his shoulders hammering at the dry ground.

But Jason couldn't help the way he felt. When he looked out across the yard, he saw Isaac waiting for him at the house with a toy car in his hands. It was one of those sky blue days in Jason's mind when the boys were still babies. He had been setting poles for the new fence all morning, pouring concrete from a red wheelbarrow. It was a job that had to be done. They couldn't live so close to the road and raise boys without a fence around the yard. He looked up that morning at Isaac and smiled, shading his eyes from the sun with the palm of his hand.

"Let's play," Isaac said, holding up the car.

"It won't be long," Jason said. "I'm almost done."

The ax glanced off one corner of the concrete block and stuck in the ground. Isaac let go of the handle and straightened up.

"It came loose," Isaac said. "I felt something give."

"The first one is always the hardest," Jason said.

They sat together on the ground with their feet pushing in opposite directions, the concrete block shifting from side to side in the widening hole.

"At least we won't have to dig more holes," Isaac said. "We can put the new poles where the old ones were. We're bound to do a better job than you did with the swing set. I almost killed myself on that thing."

Isaac hadn't said so many words in a row since he first learned to talk. The cement broke loose from the ground, the pole tilting slowly to one side.

Jason got up and dusted his pants.

Isaac kept right on talking. "Every time I got on it, the legs would pull up from the ground. I thought the whole thing was gonna fall over."

Jason could remember building the swing set like it was yesterday. He had tightened every bolt himself and poured the cement. It was as solid as the ground until the boys got hold of it, swinging sky high and bailing out in the yard.

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"Why didn't you just slow down?" Jason said. "You didn't have to go so high."

"Are you kidding?" Isaac said. "Where's the fun in that?"

"I don't know," Jason said. "The fun of knowing you're not going to break your neck?"

Isaac looked at him like he'd lost his mind.

"It was a swing set, Dad…" He bent at the knees and grabbed the pole with both hands. He pulled the thick cement from the empty hole with a sucking noise that filled the whole yard. He straightened his back and laid it over on the ground.

Jason didn't know what to say. "I just think you should think about what you're… thinking," he said. He had no idea what that meant, though he suspected it meant nothing. He eased his way slow across the yard. He didn't care anymore what he meant by the things he said, pain shooting down the back of his leg. "You have to take first things first, find a job, then we'll talk about moving away from home."

"I already found a job," Isaac said. "That's what I've been trying to tell you. I got a job washing dishes in the restaurant where Ronnie works. I start Monday."

"Monday?" Jason said. "This Monday?"

"Ronnie said I could move in with him and split the rent. I can walk to work until I get a car."

Jason sat on the step and looked out at the yard. There was a hole in the ground the size of a man's leg.

"There's no reason to stay here," Isaac said. "There's nothing to do here."

He kept talking about what it would be like to move away from home and live on his own. He kept saying the same things over and over again, as if somehow that were going to help.

Jason wasn't listening anymore. He sat on the step and stared at what was left of the old fence. The day he had built that fence, Isaac spent the whole morning waiting for him to finish, standing in the yard and asking when would they have time to play.

It seemed, suddenly, to Jason, as if he had spent his whole life doing something else while Isaac waited for him to finish, so much so that he had come to believe that that's how it was always going to be, that Isaac would always be there for him when he got off work or finished mowing the grass on a day that seemed endless and southern blue.

Isaac was standing beside him. He was holding the pick in his hand, like some toy he'd found in the yard.

"It's not like we won't ever see each other again," he said. "I'll come home on weekends."

Jason got to his feet and crossed the yard. He leaned against the pole and tested its weight against his own. It felt as if it were solid as a stone, but Jason knew better. Nothing was as solid as stone, the shoulder of the road moving always closer to the house. N&T

James Riley teaches English at Pikeville College. His recent stories and poems have appeared in Kentucky Monthly, The Louisville Review, The Pikeville Review, The Connecticut Review, *and* Riverwind. *Riley is recipient of two Al Smith Fellowships from the Kentucky Arts Council, a 1991 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, and an Individual Artists Fellowship from the Ohio Arts Council. He lives in Pikeville, Ky., with his wife, Tammy, and their four boys. "Fences" won an honorable mention in* Now & Then's *1999 Appalachian Fiction Competition.*

The Finding
For James Still

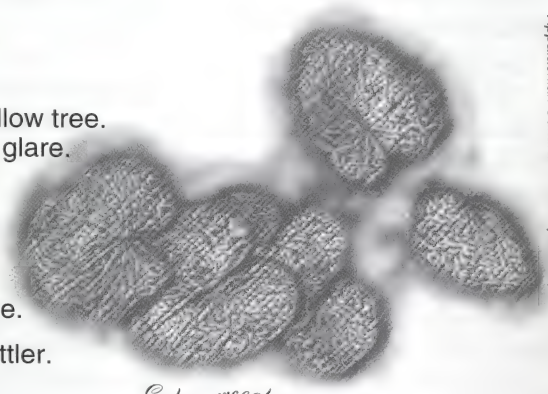
I have come at last to the place I know.
Not the place my mother knew but my place still.
I know why the ant husk hangs by a thread on my clothesline.
I know when the katydids will sing in the harmony of pulsing shrills.

I fear the drought that sucks the water from my well
And listen for the throbbing sound of piliated woodpecker pounding on hollow tree.
I know the slippery rocks of algae-wet and the burning rocks of summer's glare.
And I know the deer's brown eyes and the sting of cat briers.

I see bear-claws clutching sunflower feeders
And the endless patience of wasps to build and build again.
I take my garbage to the tree's feet beside the deep green galax.
I watch brown grasshoppers lunge zig and zag against the roar of machine.

I walk in a place where dry leaves fall and dark holes harbor the timber rattler.
I stand beside the yellow pines that cling to the thin-soiled rock.
There is room for me in the clear still waters touched by water striders and crayfish
In the presence of the patterned glow of the striped water snake.

—Joyce Compton Brown



Galax urceolata

Based on a photograph by Catherine Pinson, Appalachian Cultural Museum, Boone, N.C.

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Hero Tears

By T. J. Morral

"For me, the process of writing begins by placing myself mentally in a familiar context. In my mind, I am most often seated at a desk somewhere in the mountains of Pennsylvania, surrounded by the familiar air of my youth. I would not consider my work exclusively Appalachian. Yet in one way or another, flavors of Appalachia dominate the characters, perspectives, and themes of everything I write, regardless of the setting. There is something unique about the taste of Appalachia that my palate just can't resist." —TJM

The day of my grandfather's funeral was cold. April rain soaked the ground and everything else that was left uncovered. My father's cheek was the only dry place in town.

For reasons known only to him and God, Dad wore his greasy Carharts and beaten Timberlands to the funeral, the same scraggly work clothes he'd worn day after day working beside Grandpa. None of the relatives said anything, though you'd have had to have been blind and deaf not to notice the looks and whispers of the other mourners. At the embarrassed urgings of the funeral home director, we ignored Dad's eccentricity and buried my grandfather.

When we got home, Dad changed out of his Carharts and put on his brown polyester suit. "I'll be back," he mumbled, slamming the screen door behind him.

"Where do you think he's going?" I asked.

"Lord only knows," my mother replied, her voice far away.

"Why did he wear those clothes to the funeral?"

"I wish I knew." Her eyes followed his pickup, now headed east toward town.

He pulled into the driveway shortly after midnight. Quietly I rolled off my mattress and laid flat on the bedroom floor. Through faded olive green carpet, I struggled to hear the details of the conversation unfolding in the kitchen below.

"I'm getting out while I still can." My father's voice sounded like it had been dragged through a half-dozen ashtrays. He was obviously drunk, though I had never seen him so much as sip a beer before.

"What are you talking about, Roy?" Mom shot back.

"I talked to Denny Gibson over at the real estate place on Route Six today. See, everything's already in my name — the land, the machinery, the livestock. It's all out of the estate. Denny said that'll speed things up. Four months, he figures — five at the most — until it's gone."

"What's gone, Roy? The farm? Are you out of your mind? First the funeral and now this. What's wrong with you, Roy?" My mother was a woman of faith, more prone to prayer than to anxiety. But now, in a rare moment of weakness, panic strained her voice. I could hear the back of her throat becoming tight, the kind of tightness that settles in just before you start to cry. Given the circumstances, I couldn't blame her.

"Denny says he gets four or five calls a week from flatlanders looking for bare land to build on. The livestock and machinery he'll sell at auction. We'll keep the house and outbuildings, at least for

My father's voice sounded like it had been dragged through a half-dozen ashtrays. He was obviously drunk, though I had never seen him so much as sip a beer before.

now. The rest'll be sold as building lots.

"Roy, today is not the day to even think about this. Your father wouldn't have wanted this. Don't you think we ought to talk this over?" She knew she had lost before she ever began.

> My mother was a woman of faith, more prone to prayer than to anxiety. But now, in a rare moment of weakness, panic strained her voice. I could hear the back of her throat becoming tight, the kind of tightness that settles in just before you start to cry.

"What's to talk about?" My father extinguished her last ember of hope. "It's a done deal."

He fired up the TV in the living room. I wondered what was on at that hour. The tightness poured out of my mother's throat in a puddle of tears and prayers right there on the kitchen floor.

Three months and eighteen days later, we were out of farming altogether.

Summers in Tioga County meant two things — no school and the Pennsylvania State Laurel Festival. The festival was the highlight of the calendar year, next to Christmas and the first day of buck season. The truth was that it gave a small, left-behind town its annual day in the sun. It was a weeklong collage of cheap thrills, capped off by a three-hour parade of fire trucks and Shriners, celebrated in honor of a state flower few people could even identify. It drew huge crowds.

The carnival typically rolled into town early on the Monday morning of festival week and set up right in the middle of Main Street. For no good reason, the locals viewed the carneys with apprehension that bordered on fear. They lived in legends as the bogeymen of the north, the antiheroes of stories intended to scare kids into brushing their teeth at night.

Even less lovable than the carneys were the flatlanders, tourists from places like Philly and Jersey, who invaded our country hamlet for festival week every June and for deer hunting season every November. They came in station wagons and sports cars, wearing pastels and houndstooth and other clothes no local would be caught dead wearing. Some brought golf clubs with those girly-looking socks on the end. Others brought expensive fishing rods that had never been within a hundred feet of water. They had no qualms giving us free advice about how we should run our town, and we had no qualms taking their money.

The relationship was symbiotic, like the birds that live on the backs of water buffalo in Africa. Only sometimes it was hard to tell who was the bird and who was the water buffalo.

The other festivalgoers belonged to the assorted clans of Appalachia: ridgerunners, who were the mountain families who came down from the hills once a year to pitch dimes at cheap glassware and glut themselves on funnel cakes. I always enjoyed watching them have fun at the festival. There was something genuinely honest about the thrill they got from such a rinky-dink operation.

Festival week was also the highlight of the year for Pastor Vernon Starks and the faithful flock of the Pine Creek Church of Grace and Power. While most people looked at the crowds and saw traveling gypsies and snobby out-of-towners, the Pine Creekers saw something completely different: Souls.

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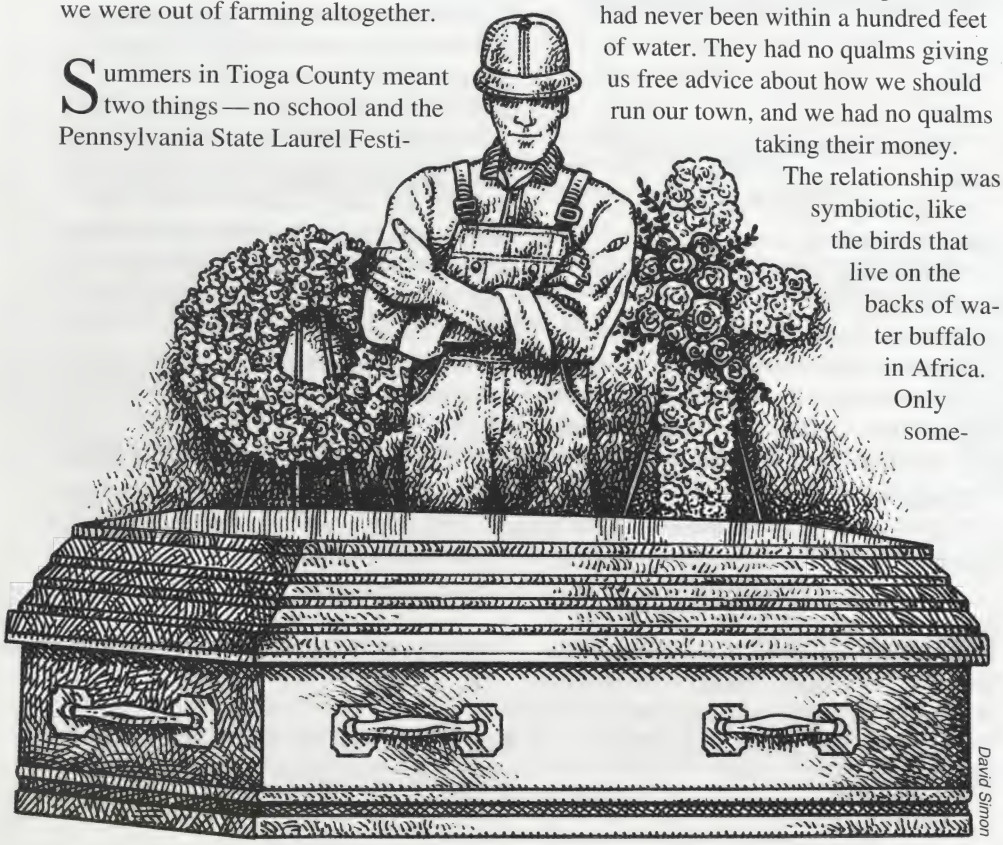
Mom regularly attended services at Pine Creek, and Pastor Vern counted her among his inner circle of parishioners. My two older brothers attended irregularly at best, usually only to appease my mother. As far as I knew, my father hadn't set foot in a church since his wedding day.

Mom started her annual spiel over breakfast on the day before the carnival rolled into town. As usual, my father had gotten up and left for who-knows-where hours before. Since we'd sold the farm, his behavior had become increasingly erratic. Sometimes he would be full of life and energy for days at a time, excited about looking for work or trying to get the farm back. But when he wasn't up, he was down, way down in an emotional funk of despair and hopelessness. He would go on hour-long tirades about how America didn't appreciate farmers or how my mother and brothers and I could help him find work if only we were more



David Simon

"supportive." Recently, there had been precious little level ground between his peaks and valleys.

"You know, Pine Creek's setting up the tent again this year," Mom piped in her best you-better-listen voice. "Pastor Vern's doin' all the preaching himself this year."

> While most people looked at the crowds and saw traveling gypsies and snobby out-of-towners, the Pine Creekers saw something completely different: Souls.

The tent was a piece of torn canvas the Pine Creekers stretched over ancient timbers to fish for souls in the middle of Main Street. They'd used it since as far back as I could remember. Now a patina of grease stains and green mold decorated its faded tan face.

"Is that right?" I replied. "Are you going to any of the meetings this year?" I asked, knowing full well she'd be there every night.

"You know I am," she shot back. "And I hope all of you are, too. It would be nice to have all of my boys together for once."

What she didn't know for sure, but most likely suspected, was that my brothers had already set up camp at Harrison's Point. They planned to have tent meetings of their own, the difference being that saving souls would be the last thing on the minds of the young people attending their gatherings.

"We'll see, Mom. Let me know if you need someone to go along with you."

After three tries, she had finally been issued a driver's license but had so little confidence behind the wheel that she was afraid to drive. Years of experience had taught her not to waste her breath asking Dad to take her, and she refused to ride with either of my brothers because they drove like fools. Although I wouldn't have my license for another year, I'd grown used to being the one she relied on every Wednesday night and every Sunday morning. I really didn't mind, though I'd never let her know it.

During the services, I would sit near the back of the church so I could sneak outside to smoke. I could usually still hear what was going on, especially during the summer months when they propped the windows open. I imagined Vern's intense facial expressions and rapid hand gestures as he paced back and forth, filling the air with staccato, sermonic phrases about holiness or grace or the Holy Spirit. The thing about Vern was that in and out of the pulpit, his words carried a kind of weight, like when the President talked on TV. That was a quality rarely seen in any of the other people I knew, and I respected him for it.

Even so, I still never went forward for his altar calls.

My stomach growled most of the way home on the Wednesday of carnival week. Dirty white buckets and various lengths of baler twine littered the driveway, reminding us that there would be no hay made this year. My father's pickup was parked at the far end of the filthy barnyard. A large segment of the windshield was missing. The radio antenna was twisted, and a medley of dents adorned the driver's side door panel.

Inside, Mom stood at the kitchen sink with a pocket-sized *New Testament and Psalms* clutched in her right hand. The drying rack was completely bare, as were the counter and the table. A trio of perfectly folded dishrags saddled the edge of the sink. She tried to hide the fact that she'd been crying as best as she could.

"How was your day? Are you hungry?" Everything was fine in the land of make-believe.

"Where is he?"

"He's resting in the living room. He just needs some time to himself, that's all."

The living room was darker than I'd ever seen it before. The cloth straps that held back the heavy layered drapes were gone, creating a cavelike environment in the middle of our house. The windows were covered, though a little light crept in from the kitchen and around the edges of the drapes. My father sat completely still in the far corner. The recliner he sat in was fully upright, his hands resting peacefully on the arms, his eyes intently fixed on nothing in particular. Somehow he had managed to create the illusion of genuine control.

"Hey." What do you say when your father is melting down in your living room? I noticed dried blood caked to his right hand. "I saw your truck."

"So what?"

"What's going on, Dad?" My voice trembled in frustration. I felt anger burning a hole in my chest. "How long are you going to do this? You're gone half the time, and when you are here, you're either drunk or asleep. You're pathetic. And what's more pathetic is that you don't even care."

"Don't worry about it. It's none of your business." His words slid together, aided by the lubricating power of Jim Beam.

"You've made it our business, Dad." Slowly I wiped my eyes with a frayed flannel sleeve.

My father struggled to maintain control. He gripped the arms of his chair tightly, and his eyes blinked repeatedly in the battle for his emotions. Silently we sat in the darkness for a lifetime.

"You can get the truck fixed in a day or two. You know that, right?" I asked, more out of guilt than concern.

Silently he swiveled the recliner toward the wall and began rocking back and forth.

> The tent was a piece of torn canvas the Pine Creekers stretched over ancient timbers to fish for souls in the middle of Main Street. They'd used it since as far back as I could remember. Now a patina of grease stains and green mold decorated its faded tan face.

The rhythm reminded me of the times I had sat on his lap in the same chair. I left quickly when a cool, clean stream of tears threatened my indifference.

Back in the kitchen, my mother hadn't moved from her place at the sink. "Rest. That's all he needs," she said. "Just rest."

Before dinner, I called the auto parts

store and ordered a new windshield on credit.

I sat through the whole service that night. At the end, Pastor Vern opened the altar. "Every head bowed, every eye closed," he said. "The Lord knows what it's like to have a broken heart. He's been there before, too. There's a good chance you've broken His heart once or twice yourself. But tonight, He's here to heal."

The thing about Vern was that in and out of the pulpit, his words carried a kind of weight, like when the President talked on TV. That was a quality rarely seen in any of the other people I knew, and I respected him for it.

I kept my eyes closed, afraid that Vern might pray for me or something if I opened them. From the front row, I heard the sound of muffled tears. I wondered what my mother was thinking.

"Maybe someone you love has hurt you. Maybe you've hurt yourself," Vern continued. "God doesn't care one way or the other—He just wants to help you. So if you have an ache deep inside, I'm going to ask you to do something bold. I'm going to ask you to stand and come up to the altar right now"

Immediately people rose and made their way toward the makeshift altar at the front of the tent. I opened my eyes just long enough to throw a glance at the middle-aged woman wearing heavy makeup and a yellow cotton dress, playing "As the Deer Panteth for the Water" on the keyboard.

Then, through the dim electric light of the tent, I saw my mother. She was kneeling at the front, her head drooped like a flower in the August sun. At that moment, I realized she was completely empty. I couldn't see her face, but I could tell she was crying by the steady heaving of her shoulders. It broke my heart.

As I watched, Vern knelt beside her. He rested his hand on her shoulder while his lips spoke a semi-audible prayer. Suddenly, I felt like an intruder, voyeuristically out of place in the sanctity of my mother's moment. In silence, I left my seat and headed out the back of the tent, leaving my mother at the front with her heaviness, her pastor, and her God.

I awoke the next morning to the smells of sausage and coffee rising from the kitchen. The greasy smell of the sausage sent my innards into spasm. Outside the grass shone with dew. Judging by the coolness of the air and the shadows cast by the early morning sun, I guessed it was no later than eight o'clock. Mom sat at the kitchen table, sipping coffee from a chipped mug bearing the words, "World's Greatest Mom." Something seemed different, though I wasn't sure what it was. Her face exuded a light I hadn't seen in a long time. It felt comfortable, like an old pair of jeans.

My father sat across the table from Mom. He was cleanshaven, wearing a crisp navy polo shirt and a pair of ironed khakis. Somehow I managed to control my shock long enough to pour a cup of coffee and murmur something close to "good morning."

"I'm going to the meeting with your mother tonight, so she won't be needing you to take her if you don't want to." My father's lip quivered nervously as he exercised his first ounce of leadership in months. "But I think you ought to go to the meeting, too."

"I was planning on it," I replied.

His lip stopped trembling. "Good." My mother smiled. And that was that.

I spent the afternoon wandering streets, sidewalks, and ultimately the serpentine maze of booths at the carnival. As I walked, I passed by a multitude of familiar faces: the twenty-something girl who worked the counter at the Mobil station; the retired widower who used to own the hardware store. I wondered if their lives were as normal as they seemed. I wondered if I would know if they weren't.

Toward evening, it began to rain, lightly at first. A rainbow of umbrellas spotted Main Street and competed with the bright colors of the Tilt-A-Whirl and the Himalaya. The rain picked up, glutting the gutter with water. As an army of cigarette butts and candy wrappers swam in its current, the asphalt was cleared of a week's worth of grime and muck.

They say mountains are moved on rivers of tears. But sometimes, when the mountain refuses to budge, I think the river finds a way around it. Soon I would go to the tent meeting. I would be uncharacteristically late.

Maybe things would be different now. Maybe Dad's upswing would stay up. Maybe his ups and downs would level out into an eternity of fresh polo shirts and mornings at the breakfast table. But probably not.

Then again, maybe today would at least roll into tomorrow, and the mountain would move ever so slightly.

Maybe. N&T

Timothy Morral is a native of Wellsboro, Pa., the county seat of Tioga County in the north-central part of the state. Having received a master's of divinity degree from the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, he is presently on the pastoral staff of New Covenant Fellowship in Penfield, N.Y., where he serves as executive director of the Penfield Hope Center, an outreach counseling and support group ministry he founded. In addition to being a contributor to the Rochester Christian Voice, *a local weekly newspaper, he has sold short fiction to the* Annals of St. Anne de Beaupre, *a Canadian Catholic journal.*

Watauga County: 1803

Night falling, river rising
into the cabin, a hound
howling on the porch, and then
an unbuckling from bank roots,
no time to lantern children
up to loft or higher ground
as the cabin, current-caught,
filled like a trough before lodged
on a rock, and when dawn brought
neighbors and kinfolk the hound
still howled on the porch, allowed
no one to enter until
shot dead by a flintlock pressed
against its head so men might
drag out those drowned in the harsh
covenant of that failed ark.

—Ron Rash

Ron Rash teaches at Tri-County Tech in Pendleton, S.C. His third book of poems, Raising the Dead, *will be published by Iris Press in the fall of 2001.*

The **Mighty** and **Enduring Pen** of **John O'Hara**

by Christine M. Goldbeck

John O'Hara's fictional town of Gibbsville is a thinly disguised portrait of Pottsville, the seat of Schuylkill County in Appalachian Pennsylvania's anthracite region.

It is a town that has changed a great deal since the early part of the 20th century when O'Hara, a home-grown writer whose books won him international acclaim, exposed the eccentricities and flaws of the hard coal region's rich and poor, the famous and the infamous in his novels and short stories. For one thing, Pottsville now has Gibbsville street markers. Above the sign designating Mahantongo Street is a second decorative plaque declaring it to be "Lantenengo Street," the title O'Hara gave this ritzy residential street in his many works about the area.

Pointing out such parallels between the Pennsylvania town and its fictional counterpart would have been unthinkable in O'Hara's day. Any Pottsvillian who would have dared to suggest such signs in 1934, following the initial printing of his first novel, *Appointment in Samarra,* might have had his country club membership permanently revoked.

John O'Hara set out to tell the truth about life in Pennsylvania's anthracite region. Some folks still haven't forgiven him.

Rare Books and Manuscripts, Special Collections Library, Penn State U.

The study filled with memorabilia from his long writing career helped release John O'Hara's creativity.

Still Controversial

After a period when he was all but forgotten, O'Hara is once again evoking intense emotion, both at home in Schuylkill County, called Lantenengo County in his fiction, and in the wider world of literature.

Many Pottsville families complained that the social realism of his stories left them feeling exposed to the world. Descendants of those families are particularly prone to argue the merits of his work with the readers and writers who think O'Hara was a major American talent.

To the first group of people — those who think his fiction hit too close to home — there are few, if any, merits to his work. O'Hara was a liar, and there is nothing further to discuss, thank you. Members of Pottsville's upper social strata felt at the time — and some of their families continue to believe — that O'Hara was a traitor who embellished the facts in unforgivable ways and called it fiction. At the same time, other citizens were angry and insulted whenever his Gibbsville books appeared because they thought he *should* have written about them in his yarns.

To fans, however, O'Hara told the truth about people and life. Enthusiasts are hard pressed to name their favorite among his essays, stories, and novels. Those who believe he was among the best of 20th century authors say he repeatedly showed himself to be a master of dialogue and description.

A Career Gets Launched

O'Hara, born in Pottsville on January 31, 1905, was an Irish Catholic, a "papist" as Pottsville's wealthy WASP elite called him. A doctor's son and the eldest of eight children, the writer

had a privileged early childhood. However, when he was 20, his father died suddenly, and the O'Hara family was left with no money and no breadwinner. That made him a contradiction in terms: a poor papist living on Pottsville's opulent Mahantongo Street.

The young man badly wanted to attend Yale, one of the Ivy League schools favored by Pottsville's WASPs, but the death of his surgeon father made that out of the question. Instead O'Hara began earning a livelihood as a newspaper reporter for the *Pottsville Journal,* then moved to Chicago where he was employed in various blue-collar jobs, including work as a steel mill worker, a soda jerk, and a gas meter reader, among other occupations. From Chicago, he relocated to New York City, where he wrote for several publications: the *Daily Mirror,* the *Morning Telegraph,* and *Time* magazine. By 1928, O'Hara saw the beginning of his highly successful career as a writer of fiction with his first sale to *The New Yorker.*

Shortly after writing *Appointment in Samarra,* he went to Hollywood to write screenplays. He subsequently returned to New York City, where he lived until moving to Princeton, N.J., with second wife, Belle, to escape the city air that aggravated their daughter Wylie's asthmatic condition. In 1957, three years after Belle's death, he and his third wife, Katherine, built his estate, Linebrook, in Princeton.

A Body of Work

In talking about his body of fiction, dissenters and fans alike have many works from which to choose. "It's not like we're talking about James Joyce who put out — what? — about three major works," observes David A. Morowitz, an O'Hara devotee and physician who practices medicine in the Washington, D.C., area. "O'Hara really put them out — and on a manual typewriter."

Few of O'Hara's traits have not been covered by biographers, critics, and fellow Schuylkill Countians. For example, the press made his drinking habits legendary. Nonetheless, Morowitz may have come up with something new. "He was very romantic, I think," the doctor says. "He married three times; the second two were for real. I think he really believed in love, especially in the beauty of the love that transcends conventional love."

O'Hara's sudden death silenced many of his critics. Unfortunately, it tended to silence his supporters as well.

There were, all told, 16 novels and 402 short stories. O'Hara had sold more than 40 million copies of his books by the time of his death. Hollywood made several of his bestsellers into major motion pictures, including *Butterfield 8* with Elizabeth Taylor, *From the Terrace* with Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward, and *Ten North Frederick* with Gary Cooper. In addition, O'Hara won a Screen Writer's Award for his work on the film adaptation of the 1940 Rodgers and Hart Broadway musical *Pal Joey,* which in turn was based on a series of O'Hara *New Yorker* stories. The author also had a radio show and wrote essays on topics ranging from smoking cigarettes to political personalities.

Christine M. Goldbeck

The oldest of eight children, John O'Hara grew up at 606 Mahantongo Street. The house is now an apartment building.

O'Hara wrote the so-called Gibbsville Cycle, which consisted of five novels and more than 50 short stories set in Lantenengo County, between the early 1930s and 1960. In this cycle, he did for Northeastern Pennsylvania — and the hard coal region in particular — what writers before him had done for other areas of the country: He recorded the social history of a time and place.

Going in for Disguises

To read O'Hara is to know, beyond doubt, what people in the early 20th century wore, where they worked and how much they earned, to which clubs they belonged, what kinds of automobiles they drove, what slang they used, and what games they played. Even though he did not return often to Pottsville once he'd moved away, O'Hara was still able to report factually on his hometown and its environs.

In a December 5, 1955, interview in the *New York Herald Tribune Book Review,* critic John K. Hutchens asked O'Hara point-blank if Pottsville and Gibbsville were the same town. O'Hara answered, "The across-the-tracks stuff, the canal, the railroad are where I have placed them. Ethnologically, too, as well as topographically, I have stayed close to the facts of Pottsville."

Christine M. Goldbeck

Dr. O'Hara's office and the O'Hara household were located near this area of lower Mahantongo Street in Pottsville, Pa.

As for whether his characters were real people in Pottsville, O'Hara said in the same interview that a few minor characters were all but photographed to populate a party. "But beyond that, or above it, I go in for disguises. I use the psychological pattern of a real person, then cover him up with the superficial aspects of another."

Success — and Criticism

In an April 1934 letter to Wolcott Gibbs, reportedly his favorite *New Yorker* editor for whom he named "Gibbsville," O'Hara announced: "Wolc: I've finished the novel, turned in the MS, had the title [*Appointment in Samarra*] approved."

Appointment in Samarra was the first of his Gibbsville novels, the work that launched his career as a writer of international acclaim. This novel, regarded by some as an American classic, documents in excruciating detail the rapid self-destruction of Julian English over the Christmas weekend of 1930. English was a young, well-educated, hard-drinking WASP member of Gibbsville's upper crust.

In his hometown and throughout Schuylkill County, where you might think O'Hara would have been praised for his work, the criticism began and continued throughout the rest of his life. Immediately following its first printing, *Appointment* was not placed on a shelf at the Pottsville Area Free Public Library. Not only did the locals find it insulting to their city, they also thought it immoral because of its sexual explicitness. (Of course, the racy content in his work pales in comparison to what is available today.) Nevertheless, the same people who shunned O'Hara publicly often read him in private.

O'Hara usually didn't fare any better with critics in New York and elsewhere. Even when he did win critical approval, he frequently ran into negative public opinion. For example, *Ten North Frederick,* which won the 1956 National Book Award and which many reviewers and readers alike considered his most successful lengthy novel, was banned in Detroit and Albany, N.Y., for its sexual content.

O'Hara seemed to enjoy having fun with his detractors. Sometimes he acknowledged the discomfort he was causing in subsequent work. Consider this passage from his short story, "A Case History": "The news that Buz Drummond was writing a book immediately caused some alarm, since the town had not fully recovered from the notoriety that followed the publication of several novels by a former resident."

During the decades following his death, critics and some scholars were still opining that his work lacked the depth of contemporaries John Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway. Some still do.

For example, Pottsville poet and author Vincent D. Balitas, who holds a doctorate in literature and criticism from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, founded and edited *The John O'Hara Journal.* Now defunct, the publication was a literary journal that began as a publication of essays on O'Hara. Balitas knows how to stir up O'Hara fans by insisting that the author, although "a very good writer of short stories" was not, in his opinion, of the first rank. "He's just not a Faulkner," says Balitas.

Morowitz, ever the faithful fan, disagrees. He got hooked on O'Hara's work when he was about 15 and first read *The Doctor's Son and Other Stories.* "I went into a brief period where I thought that if I can read and understand a book, then it was not good," he admits. "I thought, 'O'Hara can't be much good because I can understand him.' Fortunately, that didn't last long. I realized good writing does not have to be difficult to understand. Good writing just has to be good writing."

Descending Into Obscurity

O'Hara's sudden death of a heart attack on April 11, 1970, silenced many of his critics. Unfortunately, it tended to silence his supporters as well. Other than sporadic interest on the part of a handful of academics, few read or discussed his work during the 1970s.

While Pottsville and other larger towns in Schuylkill County — Shenandoah, Ashland, Mahanoy City, Orwigsburg, Schuylkill Haven, and Tamaqua — were evolving from wealthy anthracite production and textile manufacturing hubs to service-based economies, while the downtowns were being abandoned for strip malls and county natives were leaving in droves to find work, O'Hara was consigned to an occasional mention, usually negative, in magazines such as *The New Yorker.* At home, there were the few who valued his books and the many who sold them for a dime a book at yard sales. Or they buried them in book hell, inside cardboard boxes invaded by bookworms and rats.

Despite the accuracy with which he captured his era, O'Hara's works have traditionally not been classroom social studies material. But that seems to be changing.

Then, more than a decade following his death, local fans — and those who realized they might be able to capitalize on his

works to generate tourist revenue — initiated efforts to keep his name alive.

In 1982, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission placed a marker in front of the building on Mahantongo Street where the author grew up. And in the early 1980s, the Schuylkill County Council for the Arts (SCCA) in Pottsville began staging John O'Hara festivals at which his works were dramatized and discussed. Although they have not been staged every year, the SCCA is reviving the event the weekend of October 13, 2001, in the wake of a successful O'Hara conference last fall.

Despite such projects, and some few and far between visits by journalists who came to see what Pottsville was all about, the name and work of O'Hara were seldom mentioned in Schuylkill County circles or by the mass media.

Reviving O'Hara

Ironically, it was biting criticism that rekindled national and local interest in O'Hara. In *The New Yorker's* September 13, 1993, issue, critic and award-winning fiction writer Harold Brodkey wrote a review of the 1992 O'Hara anthology, *Gibbsville, Pa.* Biographer Matthew J. Bruccoli, University of South Carolina professor of English, had edited the anthology. In that review, Brodkey asserted that O'Hara was "a falling down, no-holds-barred, contentious drunk" who "wrote stories on the side." In his estimation, O'Hara's writing was unpolished and unbelievable. Although Brodkey was strongly critical of the Pennsylvania writer's work, he did acknowledge that O'Hara holds the record for the most stories — 225 during his lifetime — published in *The New Yorker.*

Brodkey's article, like most others published in New York City-based magazines, pondered the question: Was O'Hara a major literary figure? At home, in what O'Hara called his "Pennsylvania Protectorate," the debate often hinges on whether he told the truth. This debate over his veracity is the same debate that took place during his lifetime, just in a new forum.

Renewed interest has increased the value of O'Hara's books. First editions of* Appointment in Samarra *sell for $1,500 and more.

Fans were prepared to come out swinging like an O'Hara character. The hometown newspaper gave the Brodkey piece full play, quoting both critics and supporters. "Immortality still eludes the Gibbsville creator," read *The Pottsville Republican* (now the *Pottsville Republican and Evening Herald*) headline from the December 11-12, 1993, issue.

"I think he told the truth about how he perceived us," says James Kevlin, current *Pottsville Republican and Evening Herald* editor. "But I think his fiction is just as much about what was going on in his head as in the world outside it. Sure, there was hypocrisy and pettiness here, but there is hypocrisy and pettiness everywhere. The reality is a lot more cheerful than O'Hara depicts it."

Kevlin, a native of New Jersey, worked in New England and upstate New York before coming to Pottsville 11 years ago.

Christine M. Goldbeck

Newly erected street signs identify buildings and streets renamed by O'Hara in his fictionalized town of Gibbsville.

Since his arrival in coal country, Kevlin has written his share of editorials about O'Hara and Gibbsville, and his Pulitizer Prize-winning newspaper has written extensively and fairly about the author.

In 1995, the year of the 90th anniversary of John O'Hara's birthday, WVIA, a public radio and television station with headquarters in Pittston, Luzerne County, Pa., orchestrated a series of radio programs about O'Hara and his work. Also in 1995, the Modern Library, a division of Random House that reprints classic books, released a hardcover version of *Appointment in Samarra.* Three years later when the Modern Library's editorial board released its list of the "100 Best Novels of the Twentieth Century," *Appointment* was number 22.

An Epitaph

John O'Hara knew exactly how he wanted to be remembered. "Better than anyone else," he wrote in his own epitaph which appears on his tombstone, "he told the truth about his time, the first half of the twentieth century. He was a professional. He wrote honestly and well."

At another time, O'Hara elaborated on what he saw as his mission in life. "The 20s and 30s and 40s are already history, but I cannot be content to leave their stories in the hands of historians and editors of picture books. I want to record the way people talked and felt and thought and to do it with complete honesty and variety."

Despite the accuracy with which he captured his era, O'Hara's works have traditionally not been classroom social studies material. But that seems to be changing.

It is time to study O'Hara in America's schools, says Pamela C. MacArthur, who holds a doctorate in history from Sussex University in England. Born in Windsor, Ont., MacArthur first became acquainted with O'Hara's work when she was 18. Like Morowitz, she was taken by "The Doctor's Son," the autobiographical short story considered by many to be among his best. Between 1993 and 1999, MacArthur wrote a biographical study on the author and his work during her doctoral studies. Her love for his literature first brought her to Pottsville in 1984 to con-

duct research. She returned several times and in 1999 decided to become a coalcracker — a resident of the Pennsylvania anthracite region. "I loved it so much, I decided to make it my home," she recalls.

Today she puts her knowledge of O'Hara to use as a history professor at Penn State Hazleton in Luzerne County, Pa., and as the writer of *John O'Hara's Anthracite Region,* a book-length photographic essay of the scenes and places of the writer's youth. The 1999 publication is part of Arcadia's Image of America series; Arcadia is an imprint of Tempus Publishing, Inc., in Charleston, S.C.

MacArthur believes O'Hara's niche in literary history is based on his skills as a historian. "He was an ethnologist, a geographer, and a social historian. His books provide a great deal of history on the anthracite region. He belongs in the American curriculum," she insists.

Mantura Gallagher, an English literature teacher in the Pottsville area school district, wholeheartedly agrees. Gallagher is using O'Hara's less risqué works in her middle school classroom, thereby acquainting students with the works of a native author and allowing his stories to show them what their communities were like in their grandparents' youth.

Community courses incorporating O'Hara's work are also offered. For example, Balitas is currently facilitating a course titled "The Small Town in American Literature" in Pottsville's Yuengling Mansion; the mansion, formerly owned by the family who started America's oldest brewery, is currently the home of the SCCA. Students discuss O'Hara's *Appointment in Samarra* in addition to Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* and Sinclair Lewis' novels, *Main Street* and *Babbit.*

O'Hara's Landscape

Despite the fact that Schuylkill County's economic landscape has changed drastically since O'Hara's childhood, some sites and locations found in his books have changed little. Visitors will find that Pottsville's Mahantongo Street is still the street where, as the locals call them, "the moneyed people" live. Mansions that stood during the novelist's boyhood days are well-maintained.

Other sites are gone, however. For example, a March 2001 fire gutted the Queen Anne/East Lake-style townhouse on Centre Street in which Clinton Sheafer had been raised. Clinton, son of prominent entrepreneur William Lesley Sheafer, was the model for a character named Whit Hoffman in *Appointment in Samarra.*

Pottsville's late mayor Terrence P. Reiley, who died of leukemia at the age of 33 in February 2000, had been an O'Hara fan. Last year, 13-year-old Daniel Kheloussi of Pottsville adopted a suggestion of Reiley's when it came time to devise his Eagle Scout project: He was the one responsible for the signs noting the fictional names O'Hara gave to real places and streets.

Today the Pottsville library has 149 volumes of 41 O'Hara titles. Only 80 of the books circulate; the rest are in the local history room. "That's so we always have one," explains circulation supervisor Denise Miller. She laughs, noting there definitely has been a change in local attitudes about the writer.

Renewed interest has increased the value of O'Hara's books. First editions of *Appointment in Samarra* sell for $1,500 and more. The 74 completed pages of *The Second Ewings,* the novel on which he was working just hours before his death, were issued as unbound sheets in a box. It is offered today at $130.50 and higher. Issues of *The New Yorker* in which his stories appear cost $50 and more, depending in part on the issue's condition.

Fans and scholars alike can view many of his books — including translations into German, French, and other languages — at The Pennsylvania State University's Paterno Library in State College, Pa. There visitors can find a re-creation of his Linebrook study, the Remington Noiseless typewriter on which he wrote novels and stories, and the Remington Noiseless portable on which he created *Appointment in Samarra.* In addition, those interested in the writer can search through The John O'Hara Papers in the special collections department.

O'Hara may not have won the Pulitzer, the Nobel, or the other literary awards he craved, but he has garnered a significant place in history. As a December 1993 *Pottsville Republican* editorial observed, O'Hara's writing "brings to life a lost, vital place of trolley cars, railroads, pool halls, winter nights in open roadsters, dancing into the wee hours. It leaves a vibrant record of a talented man's love-hate relationship with the complex, often troubled, always striving, tiny corner of geography we know as Pottsville and Schuylkill County."

With teachers such as MacArthur, Gallagher, and Balitas — and with a new generation now knowing who he was and what he wrote about — John O'Hara's prediction, contained in a 1934 letter to Walter S. Farquhar, longtime sports editor of the *Pottsville Journal,* seems to be coming true: "I think I'm good," he wrote honestly, if not particularly modestly, "and Pottsville will think so eventually." N&T

Christine Goldbeck is the author of A Tribute to O'Hara and Other Stories, *a collection of contemporary short stories based in the Pennsylvania anthracite region. In addition to serving as the media relations manager for www.minecountry.com, Goldbeck is an award-winning poet and a state and national award-winning photojournalist. She lives in Shenandoah, Schuylkill County, Pa.*

To Find Out More About John O'Hara

The John O'Hara Papers
University Libraries
Special Collections Department, Rare Books and Manuscripts
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park PA 16802
814-865-1793
FAX 814-863-5318
E-mail: sks@psulias.psu.edu
Finding aid: http://www.libraries.psu.edu/crsweb/speccol/FindingAids/ohara.html

The Schuylkill County Council for the Arts
1440 Mahantongo St.
Pottsville PA 17901
570-622-2788
http://www.easternpa.com/scca/

The Pottsville Republican and Evening Herald
111 Mahantongo St.
Pottsville PA 17901
http://www.pottsville.com
(search archives from news link)

Reviews

Jim the Boy: A Novel
by Tony Earley
Little, Brown and Company
Boston - 2000
$23.95 (hardcover) $12.95 (paper)

My favorite Christmas treat this past year was Tony Earley's *Jim the Boy.* It isn't a Christmas story, actually, but it is a wise and moving book that brought real joy to my holiday season.

Don't mistake my praise for seasonal sentiment or misunderstand the nature of this story. There's nothing sentimental or stereotypical about this book. *Jim the Boy* is unflinching in its depiction of loss, illness, death, heartbreak, failure, loneliness, maturity, insecurity, and change.

But it is an affirmative story about the power of finding and knowing one's place in the world. In a literary climate of impermanence and alienation, this is a particularly welcome theme. It is welcome not because it offers a message or model but because it reminds us that it is possible to be connected, protected, guided, and loved despite our essential aloneness in the intimidating adult universe.

Jim Glass, the 10-year-old hero, articulates the fears we all face growing up when he waves "an arm out at the world beyond the end of the mountain" and says, "It's too big." But Jim's story shows how this boy successfully negotiates the bigness of everything. He does this by *belonging* — to his family, his community, his culture, his history. "You're *our* boy," says his uncle Zeno.

This knowledge empowers Jim to stand alone at the end of the book on top of a boulder and contemplate the world from a new perspective: "He had spent his whole life in a single place, looking up at a mountain; he had never considered how different that place might look from the mountain's top. The world he had known all his life did not seem related to the world he saw now."

Reared during the Depression by his mother and three bachelor uncles outside the small North Carolina town of Aliceville, Jim first comes to understand his place in a relatively small world of rural ritual and community kinship. In this context, Jim's childhood comes close to the nostalgic world found in *Tom Sawyer.* But while Tom mimics the fictional plots of boyhood adventure books, Jim's adventures are real: a journey to see the ocean, a school carnival contest, a tense confrontation with tough town boys. The adults in his life are not the saints, buffoons, villains, and adversaries who surround Tom Sawyer but ordinary decent folk — sometimes weak, foolish, or mistaken but always interested in Jim's welfare. The stories that guide and ground him are not fantasies but family and community histories.

But this seemingly timeless world is on the cusp of change, signaled publicly by the construction of a new consolidated school and the arrival of electricity — and privately by Jim's acceptance of his "hillbilly" heritage. Home, while secure and familiar, is not a static place but a place of continuing accommodation and adjustment.

As in all good coming-of-age stories, Jim makes journeys "out," which enlarge and enhance his experience. These journeys all lead back home — not as a way of retreating from the wider world but as a chance to rest, recover, and reorient. Jim's meeting with his legendary paternal grandfather — a meeting anticipated and feared throughout the book — is less a return to his roots than a release into the adult world of the future. Freed from the myth of patriarchal power, sustained by the "fatherly" love provided by the uncles, Jim the Boy is ready to become the man of whom his own daddy, dead but a palpable presence, would have been proud.

— Gina Herring

Gina Herring is associate professor of English, Cumberland College, Williamsburg, Ky. Her essays on Appalachian literature have appeared in the Appalachian Journal.

Editor's Note: When Tony Earley asked his Nashville neighbor, musician Paul Burch, to perform a few depression-period hillbilly songs to accompany one of Earley's public readings of his new novel, Burch responded with 13 original compositions based on Earley's story. In a simple musical style with Jimmie Rodgers-like vocals, Burch expands the lives of Earley's characters beyond the page. In *Last of My Kind: Songs for Tony Earley's Debut Novel Jim the Boy,* Earley's characters — Jim, Sissy, Penn, Amos, and the uncles — continue their stories in what Burch calls a musical "alternative truth." *Last of My Kind: Songs for Tony Earley's Debut Novel Jim the Boy* by Paul Burch, Merge Records, Chapel Hill, N.C. - 2001. $14.97 (CD).

— MW

Time Out
by Dan Leidig
The Sow's Ear Press
Abingdon, Va. - 2000
$10.00 (paper)

Dan Leidig has lived most of his life in the Southern Appalachians of Southwest Virginia — as the child of a Methodist minister assigned to coal company towns; as a professor of English at Emory & Henry College (E&H) in Emory, Va.; and in retirement as widower, grandfather, and poet on a knoll overlooking Smyth's Chapel and the campus.

I visited Leidig recently to introduce him to my son, Reid, who uses poetry to teach ninth-grade earth science. He finds that erosion, volcanism, and metamorphic processes make good metaphors. We found the retired professor atop his knoll, hobbled by Parkinson's disease but eager to engage in conversation. As he ponders life's mysteries, he has found time to practice what he "preached" so well to students — the art of writing poetry.

It was Leidig who introduced me to poetry—and to literary criticism—as a freshman at E&H. Since then, I went on to become a professor of biology. Because of my time in Leidig's classroom, the poetry of Robert Frost has been an important part of me. Teaching ecology and evolution, I use Frost's poems because his metaphors reflect deep scientific understanding of natural phenomena. For example, there is no better introduction to the role of transpiration from plant leaves in the global water cycle than Frost's "Spring Pools."

I was offered this, my first opportunity to practice the literary criticism he taught me, after I sent a note to Leidig, thanking him for including in his latest volume, *Time Out,* the dedication: "For my students." Nearly 40 years after receiving my grade in English 114, I feel as if I'm completing a final assignment.

What has resulted from Leidig's skillful practice of his art is *Time Out,* a collection of polished poems. These poems evoke images of rural Appalachia —

steam engines and woolly worms, slag-blackened creeks and warm quilts, story-tellers and wayfaring strangers. At the same time, they offer personal reflections on life, time, and death from the perspective of a keen and thoughtful observer.

To me, the most appealing of these 32 poems are those recounting childhood memories of carefree play: shooting for agates and steelies, playing capture-the-flag, hiding-and-seeking, and sledding at night. And then there is this wonderful list from "Time Out," the title poem: "How we rode the world round,/curled in the wombs of tire,/pummeled and tunneled in hay,/mounted the steeds of swings,/gave wing to houses in trees,/breathed the cold recesses of caves."

But the pleasant memories in "Time Out" are accompanied by sober, even somber reflection on what those children face: "Our hearts a pulse of undying,/like swallows we darted and wheeled/toward dusk, sure we would never die." Two pages later, in "Education," a child does die, a victim of an accidental shooting, and classmates are forced to find "some last—or first—/connection between the comings/and goings of small things." I had the same kicked-in-the-stomach reaction to this unwelcome event as I recall having experienced upon first reading "Out, Out—," Frost's chilling poem about a young boy's death as the result of a chain saw accident.

But I'll forgive Leidig the intense discomfort "Education" caused me because he has given me two treasures: "Initiation," an account of an exhilarating sled-ride at night through the "main and only street" of town, and "Acts of Recovery," which describes a button-down pocket in a remnant quilt: "Unbuttoned, it offered a cookie,/a penny, or a sliver of hard Christmas candy./Or more often, just a warm, secret place,/a mama's magic prescription/ for pockets of Depression."

There is a contemplative quality to poems written in and about retirement. I especially like "Abeyance," "Deer Crossing," and "Exchange," in which the observant poet finds transcendence in being immersed in nature. These metaphors do not reflect the deep scientific understanding I so admire in Frost's poetry, but they are just what you might expect from the son of a preacherman who taught at a Methodist college.

The vocabulary throughout is that of a well-read English professor, but only one poem directly reflects his college teaching experience. "Generations" recounts preparations for a visit from "a student of too many years ago." Knowing that "the new generations do not always succeed/their teachers, but they always try: . . ./He puts the old pot on the stove/setting the dial on *Simmer,*/the contemplative mode, hoping/that now, better than he, she can say/how the faint mist rising/both derives and departs/from the old grounds below."

Dan Leidig's "students," old and new, will treasure this slim volume.

—Dan M. Johnson

Dan M. Johnson was raised in Blacksburg, Va., and is a 1965 graduate of Emory & Henry College. He went on to earn a doctorate in zoology from Michigan State University in East Lansing, Mich. His research has focused on the ecology of larval dragonflies. He is professor and chair of the department of biological sciences at East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tenn.

Handiwork
by Jim Clark
St. Andrew's College Press
Laurinburg, N.C. – 1998
$10.00 (Paper)

Poet Jim Clark's roots in Tennessee undergird the middle section of his second volume, *Handiwork.* This grouping, called "Landscapes, Voices," intersperses lyric poems—such as "The Land Under the Lake," a poem occasioned by his parents' golden wedding anniversary—with the narratives many will find to be the book's most entertaining poems. While two poems in this section stray west to Memphis, the remaining works are set in the fictional Hunter's Point area between Knoxville and Nashville.

A native of Byrdstown, located in Appalachian Tennessee not far from the Kentucky line, Clark invokes the spirit of the Appalachian region—the fundamental decency poised against an unbridled darker energy—in the prologue to "The Reverend Moody Montgomery Takes Up Serpents for the First and Last Time":

Like his Bible of Hell, which Blake said
His readers would have "whether they will
Or no," this orphan tale, this infernal
Yarn is yours, Hunter's Point. The truth
Will out—I was there. It's all well and good
To claim as your own that fine, that great man,
Cordell Hull—"Tennessee's Soldier-
    Statesman"
Boasts the tarnished plaque on the courthouse
Square. But where is Moody's Memorial?
"Tennessee's Shyster-Snake Handler"—
    How's that?
"Oh, no. No. That happened up in Kentucky.
Harlan, I believe." Twenty years since
And still the story's traded, like a load
Of unclaimed moonshine . . .

These lines underscore a couple of Clark's many gifts as a poet. That second "No" in the good citizen's denial not only demonstrates how faithfully Clark renders his characters' voices but also exemplifies his penchant for the quiet musical touch.

Such lyric gracefulness was very much in evidence in Clark's first book, *Dancing on Canaan's Ruins.* In *Handiwork,* Clark expands on that work's themes while demonstrating more fully the range of his abilities. Here once again is variety of form but with a greater diversity of subject matter. For example, the rhyming narratives are complemented by lyric poems, unrhymed and rhymed, including a ballade. Clark addresses an epistolary poem to poet John Ciardi, writes a sonnet for bluesman John Lee Hooker, and reworks a piece by poet Rainer Maria Rilke. He sets a prose poem in a seafood restaurant and even fashions a found poem out of the names of four small towns.

Furthermore, Clark has broadened his palate of effects. The subtle comedic touch is still in evidence. A poem called "Aging Gracefully" begins, "We are men in our late thirties/and we have set the neighbor's roof afire." But the sense of humor now ranges more freely, with more bite. The logo on a package of fireworks these men deploy is "a lone rocket/Atop a pair of cherry bombs."

Clark's imagery, ever particular, has grown more precise and resonant. The fireworks display these middle-aged men set off is described thus: "Independence flowers overhead, reflected/in our wistful

eyes." Later, one of the men is "pulling a bucking, sputtering hose/through a chain-link diamond." The startling simile of "wind in the empty garden/hose moans like a didgeridoo" might seem at first to be over-the-top poetizing, but then we realize how sensually accurate this image of an Australian aboriginal flute is. More importantly, this and other Outback imagery reinforces and gently mocks these beer-swilling gents' quasi-primitive rites.

"Aging Gracefully" indeed could have served as the title poem for this collection. Clark's first book mainly depicted the interior and exterior landscapes of someone setting out into the world, innocence confounded. This second one stirs in healthy helpings of grit with the previous volume's grace, and the result yields more — how else to put it? — wisdom.

Clark's narratives crackle with wit and authenticity, his lyrics ring with beauty and substance. Would that he continue to age so gracefully.

— Ben Greene

Ben Greene is from South Carolina and now lives and teaches on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. He contributed an appreciation, "Jeff Daniel Marion: Asking Questions Well," to Now & Then's *Appalachian Poetry issue in the summer of 1998.*

Blackberries, Blackberries
by Crystal E. Wilkinson
The Toby Press
London, England - 2000
$15.95 (paper)

Crystal E. Wilkinson emerges as an important Kentucky author with her first collection of short stories, *Blackberries, Blackberries.* In language that pours from the hand like rich farmland, Wilkinson presents 18 tales, set in her native Kentucky and permeated by longing.

Describing herself as a "black, country girl" who grew up in the rural part of the state, Wilkinson uses many voices to tell these tales, which vary in length from flash fiction to full-length short stories. It is the voices of *Blackberries, Blackberries* — mostly black female — that have been missing not only from Kentucky literature but also from the national body of writing. The way these women use language and their perspective on life add to the quilt of fiction.

A dominant theme is sexuality, a subject that Wilkinson takes apart and looks at from different angles — from the new innocent experience of it; the lusty, no-holding-back, see-me-in-all-my glory aspect; the unquenched burning fire of it; and the shameful can't-look-you-in-the-face situation. But as Wilkinson spins these sistah-to-sistah tales, it is with insight and wisdom. The short pieces interspersed throughout have a different rhythm, but they teach you to read this book as a collection. They almost serve as mood-setters or poses or still lifes full of poetry and harrowing honesty.

In "Music for Meriah," 28-year-old Meriah nearly drives herself mad for a jazz pianist in Lexington. She spends most of her free time following him from club to club. "A hunger clicked into the Pearly Peacock on the heels of Meriah's shoes as she sauntered toward the table," Wilkinson writes. A seasoned female band member recognizes Meriah's obsession for the pianist and gives her some advice. "The jazz woman plopped herself down into a chair at Meriah's table. 'Enjoying the show, baby girl?' she rasped out. Her breath was heavy with liquor. Meriah nodded, *yes* bobbing her head so hard that she could feel her earrings hit the sides of her neck. … 'You from here, girl?' she asked. 'Yes, ma'am,' Meriah managed. 'All my life.' 'Lord, girl, you better get out and do some living … I know there ain't too many good times in Lexington, Kentucky.'"

In "Chocolate Divine," June Gatton, a forty-something, meets Leon Slade at the Ponderosa Club in Danville, Ky. He is a "dark, silk like chocolate man" who had a "confectionery smile that made all the women melt like hot fudge on ice cream." Though June knows that "everything good to you ain't good for you," she is caught up in this player's spell when "he gives her that grinding slow dance she was daydreaming about."

Wilkinson's tales move from delicious but wisdom-imparting romps to the complexities of unwed motherhood. In "Women's Secrets" and "Tipping the Scales," she explores the scorn, "ruint," and shameful face of unwed pregnancy while in "Ritual," conception is a holy miracle and a woman's body is a temple about to bring forth an angel.

In "Devil Eggs," Wilkinson deftly shows a black child's first encounter with racism. School-aged Addie Bea is taken along to work with her mother, Oline, a domestic worker for an elderly white woman, Miss Lula. Addie Bea doesn't want to go and says, crying, "I don't like her, looking like an old haint. Biscuit dough, Elmer's glue looking …" Though the girl is plucky and full of herself, the lash of deep hatred is about to leave its permanent mark when Miss Lula rudely mistreats Addie Bea.

The ease of natural language and detailed settings buoy Wilkinson's work. In "Women's Secrets," young Iola Jean describes her mother rising late from the bed that they share in her grandparents' home, which has no running water. "Mama throws on her house dress, whisper-cussing herself all the way. Big Mama is washing up her hands now. I hear the wash pan rocking back and forth. It's got bumps in it and don't sit square with the table no more. Mama's in the kitchen now making a big racket cause she thinks Big Mama's real mad at her. The skillet and biscuit pan hit together as she pulls them from the cupboard." Poetry pours from the page as Josephine Childs in "Tipping the Scales" has a brief encounter with the father of her second child: "He took her home, painted his most breathtaking picture and come morning he was a breeze in the wind."

Wilkinson also knows the flora and fauna of her native Kentucky, its hills and dales, its city streets. And she knows these characters well, revealing them in their longing, pain, and joy. Yes, Wilkinson knows what's going down, and readers might well find themselves on the pages.

— Marie Bradby

Marie Bradby is an award-winning children's author and free-lance journalist. Her latest book is Momma, Where Are You From?

Blackberries, Blackberries *is available on the Internet from www.tobypress.com or by calling (800) 810-7191.*

Heart Cake
by Leatha Kendrick
The Sow's Ear Press
Abingdon, Va. – 2000
$14.00 (paper)

Poet and editor David Young provides an instructive dictum that illuminates Leatha Kendrick's accomplished first collection, *Heart Cake.* In an essay, "The Bite of the Muskrat: Judging Contemporary Poetry," included in the collection *A Field Guide To Contemporary Poetry and Poetics,* he notes that there are two basic directions a poem can take. It can flow "toward the ego and its concerns, or away from the individual self and toward the existence of things beyond it … In the first case, the ego ingests and incorporates the world, colonizing, as it were, rattlesnakes and rivers; the world becomes the self." If the poem moves away from the ego, "the outward flow, the 'negative capability' that obliterates self-concern, allows the self to become the world."

These directions of self and world proceed along individual paths in the volume's first two sections, "My Great Awakening" and "Heart Cake," before converging in the final section, "Waking Up," in which self and the world arrive at a kind of intellectual and emotional equilibrium. In "Beauty's Bitter Smell," Kendrick asks:

> What do I want from this world
> but a speaking part, a mark, a spot—
> a tongue lifted from the buried
> bud, loud as the narcissus'
> bloom and stink.

The result is a stunning collection of poems that chronicle, from infancy through adulthood, the poet's spiritual and sexual coming of age. That journey includes the emotional struggle with grief and loss during her mother's fatal illness, the warm and often unsettling scrutiny of family relationships, and the more immediate poems of acceptance and reconciliation that bring the collection to a satisfying close.

The title *Heart Cake* is apt because ovens—the heated interior chamber in which dough rises in response to external energies and events—are a recurring image in the poems. Consonant with this metaphor are *cakes*—"a shaped or compressed mass." In this case, the poems themselves compress, shape, and assimilate Kendrick's own feelings seasoned over a period of nearly 50 years.

In "Refusing a Spinal," the poet, requesting natural childbirth from her obstetrician, recalls witnessing as a six-year-old her veterinarian father delivering a calf:

> I saw again the gleaming
> globe of the cow's eye, the patient
> rhythm squeezing her sides, the calm
> heaving and the pale tips
> of the calf's hoofs tender as tulips
> as he left her, the swell
> and rush of water, the newborn swimming
> out into the half-dark of the barn.

Kendrick's language is deft and memorable, as limpid and stationed in memory as the concentric globe of a cow's eye.

The heart of the collection is the central section, "Heart Cake," which focuses on the poet's parents, especially her mother. Through the scrim of memory, we see the newlyweds in an old photograph and then in a series of poems portraying their domestic life—her father as the vet who was always on call; her mother, never far from a cigarette, preparing a roast for the oven or showing her children how to build a kite. In "Bull Thistle," an x-ray reveals the blotch that becomes a "prickly flower," and we witness the waning of her mother's life through poems whose imagery is dominated by flowers that trace the steady dissolution on one hand and the blooms of hope on the other until she is "set like a bulb in her oak sheath."

The themes of the final section, "Waking Up," are accommodation to the course of nature, the reality of death, and the necessity of love as the means to make the harshness of the world endurable. In "Morning with Oatmeal," the poet rises after love-making to prepare her children's breakfast in the daily ritual that sustains her world:

> Oats, schooling in the pot like flat fishes
> Breathe out their milky essences and
> Merge in the mass
> Of oatmeal.

In the poems that bring the collection to a close—"Zen Laundry," "Moonrise," "Stone Blossom," and "Falling Dark"—there is a wisdom earned through the transcendence of self after grief and loss. They impart a sense of completeness and coherence found only among poems that are forged in suffering and redeemed through grief, earned poems that reflect both confidence and craft.

Read them.

—Richard Taylor

Richard Taylor is the author of several collections of poetry, a novel (Girty) *as well as nonfiction, including* The Palisades of the Kentucky River *and* Three Kentucky Tragedies. *He teaches at Kentucky State University and has recently served as Kentucky's poet laureate.*

Pencil Memory

Rooted in the hollow of
your hand, I go underground
again, opening its catalog
of green desires.

At home between your
fingers and thumb, I slip out
of my pink and gold
underwear and walk bare
foot in the dark.

Laboring to shape what I've
never before seen or heard, I
ape bark, its uneven text,
and the weather hidden
in rings—trusting

when the grinder brings me
low, you who love me most
will slip me, tiny as
a note, back into
the melody of trees.

—Llewellyn McKernan

Llewellyn McKernan has had three poems published in Wild Sweet Notes: Fifty Years of West Virginia Poetry *(Publishers Place, 2000). Her poem, "Circuit Breaker," won the* Antietam Review's *2001 Summer Poetry Contest and her short story, "The Prisoner," received an honorable mention in this year's* Now & Then *Appalachian Fiction Competition.*

Books Worth Mentioning

Stories and Anthologies

The Balm of Gilead Tree: New and Selected Stories by Robert Morgan (Frankfort, Ky.: Gnomon, 1999; $17.95 paper).

The Best-Loved Short Stories of Jesse Stuart selected by H. Edward Richardson (Ashland, Ky.: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 2000; reprint New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982; $24.00 hardcover).

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Brier Country: Stories from Blue Valley by Elaine Fowler Palencia (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 2000; $17.95 paper).

By the Way of the Forked Stick by Billy C. Clark (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 2000; $22.50 hardcover).

Casualties by Ron Rash (Beaufort, S.C.: Bench Press, 2000; $14.95).

Margot by Kevin Stewart (Huntsville, Texas: Texas Review Press, 2001; $12.00 paper).

Molasses Man by Kathy L. May, illustrated by Felicia Marshall (New York: Holiday House 2000; $16.95 hardcover).

Old Dry Frye: A Deliciously Funny Tale by Paul Brett Johnson (New York: Scholastic Press, 1999; $5.95 paper, $15.95 hardcover).

Sporty Creek by James Still, illustrated by Paul Brett Johnson (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1999; reprint New York: Putnam, 1977; $5.95 paper).

This Is Where We Live: Short Stories by 25 Contemporary North Carolina Writers edited by Michael McFee (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2000; $16.95 paper, $29.95 hardcover).

When Uncle Took the Fiddle by Libba Moore Gray, illustrated by Lloyd Bloom (New York: Orchard Books, 1999; $15.95 hardcover).

Novels

Borrowed Children by George Ella Lyon (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1999; reprint New York: Orchard Books, 1988; $9.95 paper).

The Gate of Paradise: A Novel by Victor Depta (Martin, Tenn.: Blair Mountain Press, 2000; $11.95 paper).

The Holy Spirit of My Uncle's Cojones by Marcos McPeek Villatoro (Houston, Texas: Arte Publico Press, 1999; $12.95 paper).

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Mixed Blessings by Julia Watts (E-book available from Jacobyte Books: www. jacobytebooks.com, 2000).

MotherKind by Jayne Anne Phillips (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000; $24.00 hardcover).

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The Time of Man by Elizabeth Madox Roberts (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2000; reprint New York: The Viking Press, 1926; $18.00 paper).

Poetry

Affrilachia by Frank X. Walker (Lexington, Ky.: Old Cove Press, 2000; $12.50 paper).

From the Mountain, From the Valley: New and Collected Poems by James Still, edited by Ted Olson (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2001; $20.00 hardcover).

Late Mowing: Poems and Essays by Stephen M. Holt (Ashland, Ky.: Jesse Stuart Foundation, 2000; $9.95 paper).

Preparing a Room by Victor Depta (Martin, Tenn.: Blair Mountain Press, 2001; $11.95 paper).

The River Hills and Beyond: Poems by Lou V. Crabtree with an introduction by Lee Smith (Abingdon, Va.: Sow's Ear Press, 1998; $12.00 paper).

Tellico Blue by George Scarbrough (Oak Ridge, Tenn.: Iris Press, 1999, reprint New York: E.P. Dutton, 1949; $14.00 paper).

Topsoil Road by Robert Morgan (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2000; $14.95 paper, $22.50 hardcover).

Where I'm From, Where Poems Come From by George Ella Lyon (Spring, Texas: Absey & Company, 1999; $13.95 paper).

Wild Sweet Notes: Fifty Years of West Virginia Poetry: 1950-1999 edited by Barbara Smith and Kirk Judd, illustrated by Jan Dickinson (Huntington, W.Va.: Publisher's Place, 2000; $19.95 paper, $29.95 hardcover).

Windfall: New and Selected Poems by Maggie Anderson (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000; $12.95 paper).

Biography and Criticism

Conversations with Kentucky Writers II by Elisabeth Beattie, photographs by Susan Lippman, forward by Dianne Aprile (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1999; $29.95 hardcover).

Thomas Wolf: A Writer's Life rev. ed. by Ted Mitchell (Raleigh, N.C.: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1999; Boone, N.C.: the Appalachian Consortium, 1999; $10.00 paper).

Understanding Fred Chappell by John Lang (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000; $29.95 hardcover).

History and Memoir

The Coalwood Way by Homer Hickam (New York: Dell, 2000; $23.95 hardcover).

One Hundred Years of Appalachian Visions 1897-1996, An Expanded Second Edition compiled by Bill Best (Berea, Ky.: Appalachian Imprints, 2000; first edition Berea, Ky.: North American Imprints, 1997; $22.95 hardcover).

Sisters of Providence: The Search for God in the Frontier South (1843-1858) by Allen Paul Speer with Janet Barton Speer (Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 2000; $19.95 paper).

A Union Woman in Civil War Kentucky: The Diary of Frances Peter edited by John David Smith and William Cooper Jr. (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2000; $22.50 hardcover).

—Marianne Worthington

Marianne Worthington teaches communication studies at Cumberland University, Williamsburg, Ky., and is the reviews editor for Now & Then.

On Seeing Diego Rivera's *The Liberation of the Peon*

How surprised I am, leaning over this book
of collected art, to find myself gone soft
and teary at this picture. I know little
of the Mexican revolution, the dispossession
of brutal landowners. But I cannot move
past this page, this fresco of revolutionary soldiers
cutting the ropes off the naked peon, his back scarred,
crossed with lash marks, one soldier draping
a blanket toward the broken body, another
holding the head in cupped hands
as if palming something precious
or catching what might fall from it.

It is not without a degree of embarrassment
to life the struggle against the damp vacuum of mountains
gone hollow, of cave-ins and bodies buried beneath
blackdamp explosions. I want the mineowners
burning in the background, their money stacked
and turning no sort of safety against men claiming
retribution for the scathing wages, houses sinking
into land carved out beneath foundation.

I can imagine it: the liquid image put to rock,
the seeping in of paint, indelible, permanent
as the wall absorbs it, takes it in, those long strokes
of brush that could paint the gray-purple plumes
of those miners' mouths, the stale air

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Reviews

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Poetry

Affrilachia by Frank X. Walker (Lexington, Ky.: Old Cove Press, 2000; $12.50 paper).

From the Mountain, From the Valley: New and Collected Poems by James Still, edited by Ted Olson (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2001; $20.00 hardcover).

Late Mowing: Poems and Essays by Stephen M. Holt (Ashland, Ky.: [illegible])

the Appalachian Consortium, 1999; $10.00 paper).

Understanding Fred Chappell by John Lang (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000; $29.95 hardcover).

History and Memoir

The Coalwood Way by Homer Hickam (New York: Dell, 2000; $23.95 hardcover).

One Hundred Years of Appalachian Visions 1897-1996, An Expanded Second Edition compiled by Bill Best (Berea, Ky.: Appalachian Imprints, 2000; first edition Berea, Ky.: North American Imprints, 1997; $22.95 hardcover).

Sisters of Providence: The Search for God in the Frontier South (1843-1858) by Allen Paul Speer with Janet Barton Speer (Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 2000; $19.95 paper).

A Union Woman in Civil War Kentucky: The Diary of Frances Peter edited by John David Smith and William Cooper Jr. (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 2000; $22.50 hardcover).

—Marianne Worthington

Marianne Worthington teaches communication studies at Cumberland University, Williamsburg, Ky., and is the reviews editor for Now & Then.

On Seeing Diego Rivera's *The Liberation of the Peon*

How surprised I am, leaning over this book
of collected art, to find myself gone soft
and teary at this picture. I know little
of the Mexican revolution, the dispossession
of brutal landowners. But I cannot move
past this page, this fresco of revolutionary soldiers
cutting the ropes off the naked peon, his back scarred,
crossed with lash marks, one soldier draping
a blanket toward the broken body, another
holding the head in cupped hands
as if palming something precious
or catching what might fall from it.

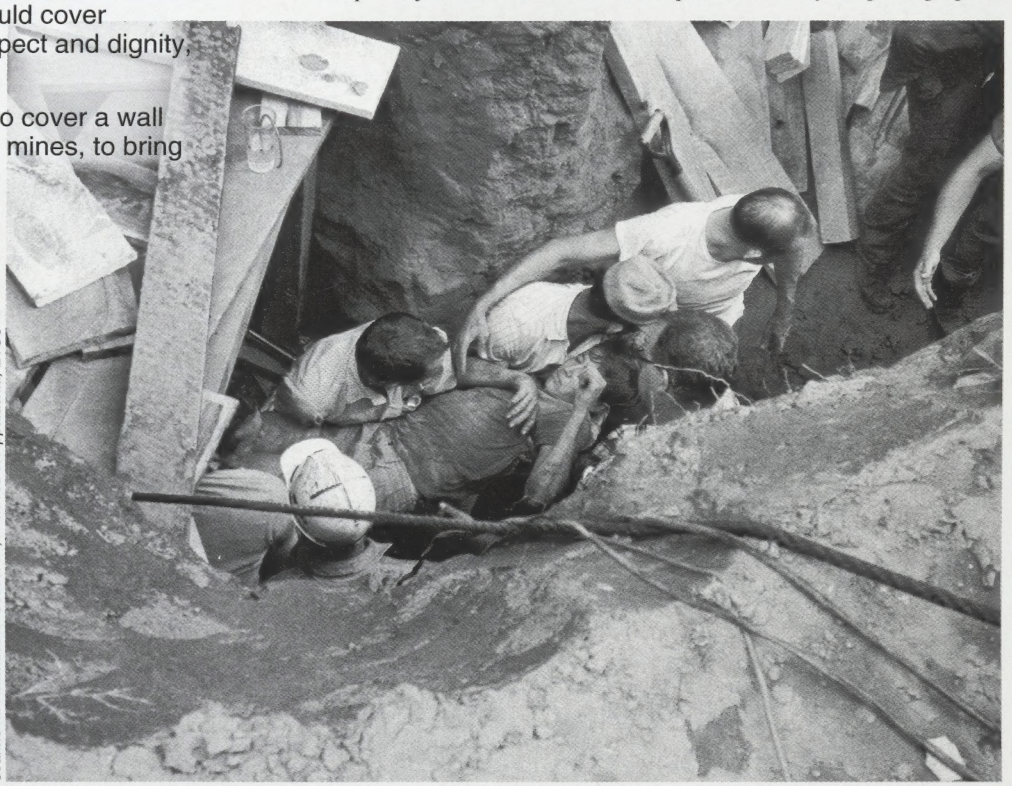
It is not without a degree of embarrassment,
a distinct recognition of my whiteness,
that I want this fresco Appalachian, want the burning
landlord's hacienda in the background to be
a mineowner's house, a mine itself. I want
that revolution in those hills my family
toiled in, the mines that took my grandfather's lungs,
and his father's and their sons' and nephews'. I want
the soldiers in this fresco Cherokee and wide-Irish boned,
the sombreros, miners' lamps perched cockeyed
and tipping in defeat. I want my grandfather's head
cradled that way by men who would cover
that barrel-chested body with respect and dignity,
save him what is left.

I want some fine, mountain soul to cover a wall
with the ash-heavy story of those mines, to bring
to life the struggle against the damp vacuum of mountains
gone hollow, of cave-ins and bodies buried beneath
blackdamp explosions. I want the mineowners
burning in the background, their money stacked
and turning no sort of safety against men claiming
retribution for the scathing wages, houses sinking
into land carved out beneath foundation.

I can imagine it: the liquid image put to rock,
the seeping in of paint, indelible, permanent
as the wall absorbs it, takes it in, those long strokes
of brush that could paint the gray-purple plumes
of those miners' mouths, the stale air
bellowing from their hardened chests.

—Lisa Parker

The recipient of a master's degree in creative writing from Pennsylvania State University in 1998, Lisa Parker has been published in PoetLore, Parnassus: Poetry in Review, Wind, Voices International, *and other journals. She received the 1996 National Randall Jarrell Prize in Poetry, the 1997 Academy of American Poets Award, and the 1999 Allen Tate Memorial Prize in Poetry. Now living in New York City, Parker hopes to finish her second book and publish some of her photographs.*



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Finding Herself in Knoxville, Tennessee, On a Non-Football Saturday, The Cosmic Possum Visits a Poetry Slam

"Appalachian poets," said the Brier,
"There's one behind every fence post."
Jack Daniels, Blue Ribbon and Heineken
called forth the Muse. Gloom, despair
and agony stirred up like scum
from the pond bottom, squatted center stage.
Misery, like kudzu, twined up the rafters,
brought down the spirit. Yuppie
glossolalia, redneck xenolalia, baptized
in the spirit of verse,
they verb-handled!

—A. Jane Hicks

A. Jane Hicks, a frequent contributor to Now & Then, *lives in Blountville, Tenn., and teaches intellectually gifted students in Sullivan County.*

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NOW & THEN
THE APPALACHIAN MAGAZINE

Center for Appalachian Studies and Services
East Tennessee State University
Box 70556
Johnson City, TN 37614-1707

Forwarding and address correction requested

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Johnson City, TN 37601
Permit No. 194

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